GROWING INTO CITIZENSHIP: THE DIFFERENTIAL ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION OF ADOLESCENTS.

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

door

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Tuned out" (Mindich, 2005) and "alienated" (Henn & Weinstein, 2006) these are just two of the labels scientists, journalists and politicians have put on the youngest generation of citizens. According to many of these voices, young adults are less engaged in politics than ever before. This claim can be supported by numbers: In the US only 26% of university freshmen think that politics is important (Galston, 2001) compared to 58% in 1966, and less and less adolescents follow political information in the media (Patterson, 2007). In Europe, similar evidence can be found. Electoral participation of the young is dwindling (Dalton, 2006), in Germany, adolescents are less likely to join in political parties (Niedermayer, 2006) or even develop a preference for one (Mößner, 2006). Henn and Weinstein (2006) observe a comparable alienation from politics in the UK among the young.

This development is a serious threat to democracy. A democratic political system cannot function without a *demos*, an active citizenry that cares and participates. This is because any democratic system depends upon legitimization through its citizens, through voting and by participating in politics. Yet, the youngest generation of citizens in Western democracies is growing up disengaged or even alienated from the political world – and are likely to remain so throughout their lives (Sears & Valentino, 1997).

In this context it is important to consider the role of the media to understand why so many adolescents are socialized in a way that leaves them feeling like they have no part in the political system today. First, because media play a prominent role in the lives of adolescents. In Europe 93% of adolescents use the Internet every single day, and 95% watch TV on a daily basis (European Social Survey). Children and adolescents aged 8 to 18 use media over 8 hours a day (Foehr & Roberts, 2010). Second, because media can be – depending on content and the way they are used – a benefit or a curse for the process of political socialization. On the one hand media are a place where adolescents can seek out or be exposed to political

information, discuss issues or even participate, for example by signing online petitions. On the other hand, media use takes up a great share of their time that could have been used for community service or other activities known to foster positive attributes of citizenship (Putnam, 2000). Additionally, some media content, for example highly strategic political information that portrays politics as a game of egoistic power players, might even be detrimental to the development of positive political attitudes. It is important to note that *media* is understood in the broadest sense here; the term includes traditional media sources like TV, newspapers and the radio as well as online news sources or participatory online media like social network sites.

Given the significance of the issue, the literature on the differential effects of media use on political socialization is relatively thin (Delli Carpini, 2004), in particular with regard to long-term effects. Since the pioneering work of Chaffee and colleagues in the 1970s (for an overview see Chaffee & Yang, 1990) only few scholars have investigated the influence of media on political socialization over a longer period of time, for example the research groups of McLeod, Shah, and others (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2010) and Hooghe and colleagues (for an overview see Hooghe, 2012). Yet, the world of political socialization has changed considerably since Chaffee and colleagues published their work during the heyday of political socialization research in the 1970s (Sapiro, 2004). Therefore an update of our knowledge of the phenomenon is needed.

Changing agents and processes of political socialization. Past research often singled out parental influence as *the* main driving force of political socialization (for example Hess & Torney, 1967), yet recent studies find parental influence to be close to insignificant (Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012). This is due to a fundamental transformation of the political culture in the past decades. Party alignments have weakened and political cynicism is generally on the rise (Hetherington, 2005). Hence, if parents have distanced themselves from politics, they

cannot serve as political role models in the way they used to anymore. At the same time social movements like the anti-globalization movement have entered the playing field and act as independent agents of socialization, motivating young and old to become engaged in often short-lived issue oriented initiatives (Norris, 2003).

Changing media system. A second factor that has changed over the past decades is the media system. Here, in particular two developments are important. First, political information has changed in content. The news is increasingly entertainment oriented and focuses on persons rather than issues. This development can be related to the general growth in apathy towards politics, mentioned above (Wirth, 2000). Second, the Internet has become an integral part of our everyday lives, especially for the young. Whereas the advent of online media has first been regarded as a threat to political socialization (for an overview see Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001), the academic debate concerning the potency of the Internet for the political socialization of the young now focuses on its opportunities (Coleman, 2008).

Research question

Given all these developments, we are in need of an update of our understanding of the processes and mechanisms of political socialization in particular with regard to the role of the media. The key question is how media influence the development of political knowledge, political attitudes, and political participation today, given that the role of other agents of socialization has changed.

It is the aim of this dissertation to contribute to the understanding of the media's role in the political socialization process of adolescents by focusing on a few key aspects characterizing the media landscape in the 21st century: a) the advent of *online media* as a regular source of information on the one hand and an interactive platform enabling political discussion and engagement on the other; b) the *dynamics* of media influence, acknowledging

that the causal relationship of media use and outcome variables of political involvement is interdependent, and c) *differential effects* of specific content and different media types.

Growing into democratic citizenship

The concept of political socialization has been thoroughly debated in the social sciences. In 1959 Hyman defined it as a person's "learning of social patterns corresponding to his societal position as mediated through various agencies of society" (p.25). Scholars of social sciences still broadly accept this definition; however, the *political* aspect of political socialization remains relatively vague by this definition. Sigel (1965) suggests defining it as "the process by which persons learn to adopt the norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors accepted and practiced by the ongoing (political) system" (p.1). This definition is useful because it specifies the areas in which political socializations takes place: *norms, values, attitudes* and *behaviors.* The definition also makes clear that political socialization is a normative process – citizens are shaped within a specific political system.

However, from today's perspective Sigel's definition can be criticized for a number of reasons: First, the individual is regarded as a passive object upon which norms, values, attitudes and behaviors are imposed. Yet, recent theorizing clearly shows that we are active participants in our own political socialization (Sears & Levy, 2003), by seeking out information about politics, negotiating its meaning and choosing the political experiences we want to participate in. Second, Sigel's definition neglects the notion of agents that mediate the political socialization process, which is a part of Hyman's definition. Agents of political socialization are, for example, parents, peers, teachers, but also the media. Finally, Sigel's definition describes a developmental process with a static outcome, whereas political socialization is now understood as a life-long process in which political cognitions, affects, norms and behaviors are constantly evaluated and potentially adapted as the political system changes around them (Sears & Levy, 2003). That being said, within this life long process,

adolescence plays a pivotal role, as it marks the period in life in which individuals face their first electoral decision. Moreover policy decisions, the outcome of the political system, gain relevance when adolescents become increasingly independent of their parents. I therefore define political socialization as a life-long process in which individuals acquire knowledge, norms, values and behaviors relevant to the ongoing political system. This process is mediated by various agents, one of which is the media.

Studying political socialization among adolescents

As mentioned above, adolescence is a pivotal period in life with regard to the process of political socialization. Children already become familiar with aspects of the political system as early as the age of six (van Deth, Abendschön, & Vollmar, 2010), but their understanding of the complex interplay of political institutions that characterizes politics remains superficial. During childhood parents are the prime agent of political socialization. By demonstrating what it means to be a citizen as well as discussing politics they can spark children's first interest in politics (Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971). As children grow into adolescence, however, parental influence becomes less and less important and peers and teachers enter the playing field as important agents of political socialization. Again, conversations about politics are the key environment in which political socialization takes place. To give an example, classroom debates in which students take on a pre-determined standpoint on an issue and defend it, are proven to be a very efficient tool to foster political participation (Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009).

During late adolescence and early adulthood the life of many young citizens changes drastically. As they graduate from secondary school and start a working life or continue their studies elsewhere, their social environment changes. Teachers and friends from school loose influence and media takes their place to a large extends as the prime source of political information and agent of political socialization. It is important to note that changes in

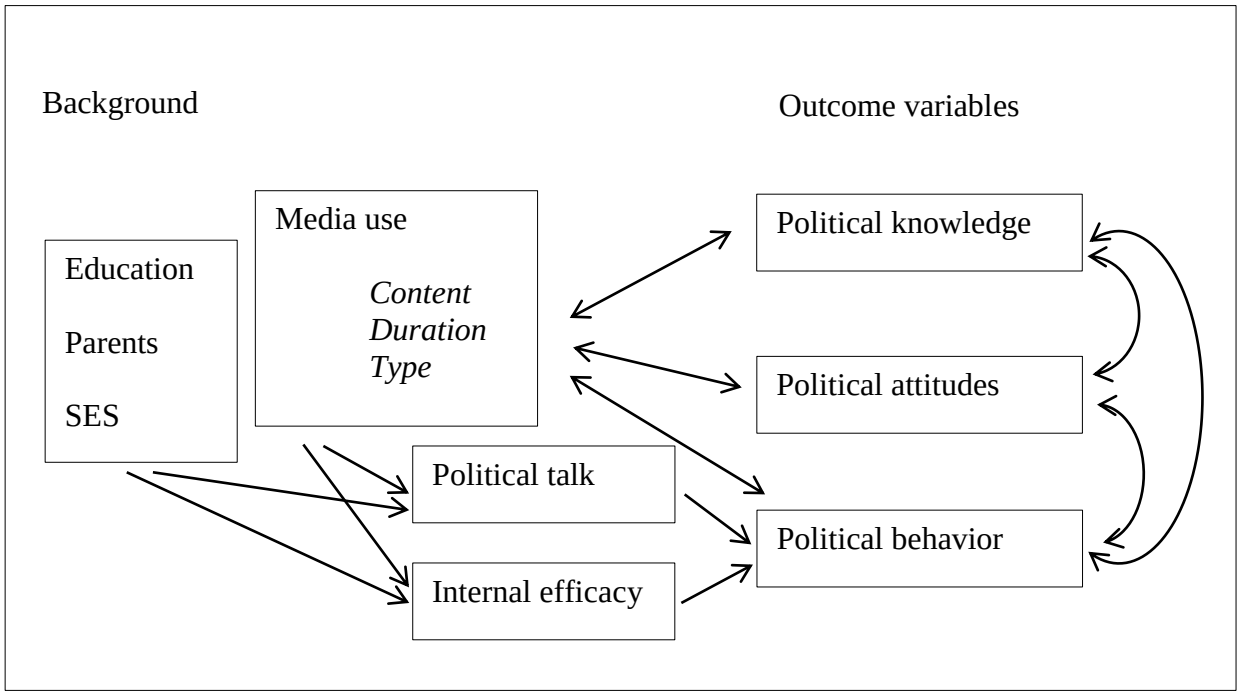
importance as agents of socialization are different from individual to individual and a gradual process. This also implies that several agents play a role in the socialization process at the same time. This is why it is so crucial to study exactly adolescence as a period in life with regard to media effects on political socialization. We need to understand how adolescents are influenced by the media and whether or not these processes function for all adolescents in the same way.

There is an additional reason why adolescence is especially interesting to study in the context of political socialization. During late adolescence young citizens are eligible to take their first electoral decisions. The decision to turn out or not in the first two elections highly correlation with turnout later in life (Sears & Levy, 2003; Franklin, 2004). At the same time, young citizens also increasingly face the effects of policy decisions taken by the government. They start to pay taxes or are enrolled in the educational system, which is subject to government regulation. This means that politics become a relevant factor in their lives, the question is whether they want to be a part of it or not.

Analytical model

In this dissertation I focus on three areas of political socialization: the development of political knowledge, political attitudes and political participation. In the following section each of these outcome variables will be discussed in the context of potential media effects. Figure 1.1 presents a simplified model of all causal processes investigated.

Figure 1.1: Analytical model of media influence on political socialization



It is important to note that the mechanisms of media effects should not be understood as a simple stimulus-response process. In fact effects of media on variables of political socialization should be understood as reciprocal and conditional upon a number of characteristics on the individual level (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). I will briefly describe each of the key elements and connections from Figure 1.1.

Political knowledge

Although the development of political knowledge is not explicitly included in Sigel's influential list of areas of political socialization it is key to the cultivation of democratic citizens. In order to take informed decisions and participate, citizens need a basic understanding of political structures and processes (*structural political knowledge)* as well as an overview of current issues at stake, key players, and ongoing political debates *(factual political knowledge).* Media use, in particular news use, can contribute to political learning

with regard to both dimensions of political knowledge – by presenting information on current events and thereby demonstrating the political process. However, political learning through news media is not a straightforward stimulus-response reaction, because it is conditional upon a number of factors, among which already existing political knowledge. Therefore the causal relationship of news use and political knowledge is best conceptualized as a mutually interdependent spiral (see chapter 3).

Political attitudes

Political attitudes, like political cynicism or political trust describe a cognitive-affective perspective on the political system and its actors. Political attitudes are important determinants of political behavior (Hooghe & Quintelier, 2011). To illustrate this with an example: political cynicism has been found to have demobilizing effects on political participation (Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001), although there is also evidence to the contrary (De Vreese & Semetko, 2002). However, let us use the example of political cynicism again to illustrate potential media effects on political attitudes. There is ample research on theorizing claiming that specific media content, for example conflict-framed news stories or coverage of political scandals, portrays the politics in an overly negative light. Exposure to this type of content gives the audience the impression that politics is a power game of egoistic players who are not concerned with their interests (see also Chapter 2). Additionally, effects of media content on cynicism are conditional upon characteristics of the media user as well as the context in which media is used (Schuck, Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2013).

Political behavior

Political participation is investigated as an area of political socialization affected by media use. In this dissertation I explicitly choose to employ a broad conceptualization of political participation, thereby deviating from the majority of research on political participation that mainly focuses on electoral participation. My definition of political

participation includes all acts intended to influence the political system: from spraying a political message on a wall to engaging in a political campaign. I use this broad definition for three reasons. The first is of practical nature. Adolescents are only eligible to vote once they have reached voting age. Yet, the crucial phase of political socialization starts before they are allowed to vote for the first time. Hence other modes of participation need to be considered when studying change in participation at this age. The second argument is theory-driven. Democracy today is a complex process of negotiating interests. Citizens have ample opportunities to be part of the policy making process even during an electoral cycle. In particular through the advent of the Internet and its possibilities to connect with like-minded people (for example by starting an online petition), citizens can directly influence parliamentary decision making. Although most of these initiatives are not directly legally binding, they still put pressure on political actors to consider the people's will. Third, we need to consider new forms of participation to validly tap into the lifestyle of the youngest generation. Flexibility is a key characteristic of the young generation in their private as well as their professional lives. This also holds for their approach towards political participation, as Norris (2004) points out. Instead of aligning themselves with a political party, young people prefer to form short lived coalitions around one specific issue (for example to stop a study reform) that quickly dissolves once their goal is reached or the issue is off the political agenda. Therefore a multitude of political activities need to be considered to be able to investigate whether or not adolescents participate in politics.

Turning to potential media effects on political participation, evidence so far is mixed. According to the literature, media has the power to mobilize and demobilize its audience – depending on characteristics of the user as well as the media source. For example, online media are likely to trigger different kind of political engagement than offline media (Vissers, Hooghe, Stolle, & Maheo, 2012). Entertainment media use, in particular regular use of

sitcoms, has been found to be negatively related to political participation (Holbert, Shah, & Kwak, 2003), whereas news media is likely to mobilize users. It is important to note that the causal relationship of these processes goes both ways. Additionally, there are two mediating factors between news use and political participation: conversations about politics with parents or peers and political efficacy. The first mediator, political talk, has been established in the work of McLeod, Shah and colleagues (2010). They demonstrated in multiple studies that exposure to news in the media among adolescents only inspires adolescents to participate in politics, if the information obtained is processed and evaluated through talking to family or friends. As I point out in Chapter 4 there is also a second mediating factor: political efficacy, to be specific: internal political efficacy or the feeling to be competent and informed enough to participate in the political process. The reason why internal efficacy mediates between political information use and participation is in line with the previous argument. Information needs to be processed in order to be effective. Once adolescents feel like they have understood what they have been exposed to, they feel competent enough to participate.

Research design and data

Two data sources

To investigate the role of the media in political socialization of adolescents I rely on two data sources in this dissertation: the European Social Survey (ESS) and an originally collected four-wave survey. This second dataset was collected for the purpose of this study among a representative sample of 15 to 18 years olds in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2012.
The ESS data set enables a comparative perspective of the phenomenon. The comparison I undertake in Chapter 2 is even twofold: First, adolescents all across Europe are compared to each other. Second, adolescents are compared to adults. The comparison of European adolescents has two advantages. First, it allows testing the influence of system-level factors,

such as the democratic performance of a country. Second, by studying 22[1] countries at the same time I can find out whether media influence on political socialization is comparable in Europe, or whether it varies among different contexts. This helps to answer the question whether the causal mechanisms of media influence are conditional upon a specific type of political or media system.

The second comparative perspective concerns potential differences in media effects on adolescents and adults. As explained above, the focus of this dissertation is media effects during adolescence, because this period is so crucial for the development of democratic citizens. As I choose to focus on one specific age group, I implicitly assume that the impact of media on adolescents is inherently different than on adults. It might be stronger, due to sheer amount of time adolescents spend with the media, but it might also be weaker as the media is just becoming an influential player in the formation of political knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Using ESS data in the second chapter enables me to test this assumption explicitly and find out whether there is in fact a difference in media effects between adults and adolescents.

The four-wave panel survey was specifically designed for the purpose of this study in cooperation with our project partners Frank Esser and Ruth Kunz at the University of Zurich, who carried out a similar panel survey in Switzerland in the same time period. The survey was collected within the broader frame work of project IP10 as part of National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) *democracy* funded by the National Swiss Science Foundation. The data collection in the Netherlands was partly funded by NCCR and partly founded by the Amsterdam School of Communication Research.

Using panel data to study political socialization is a worthwhile undertaking, as political socialization is a dynamic process that plays out over a long period of time. To study such a

[11] For specifications on the ESS data see Chapter 2.

process reliably it is crucial to analyze the phenomenon longitudinally. Instead of focusing on the level of political engagement or knowledge at a specific point in time, I am setting out to study growth or decline in the dependent variables and how changes in media use relate to either of them. This creates a more inclusive picture of the causal relationships at stake. A second advantage of using panel data over such an extended period of time is that I am able to depict a significant part of the adolescent political socialization trajectory. This implies that media effects observed in this study are long-term media effects that are likely to last longer than the study period of two and a half years, and certainly longer than media effects found in experimental studies.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire used to collect the data consists of 59 questions in the first measurement and 50 questions in the second and third measurement. The majority of questions asked in the questionnaire consisted of multiple items that were separately rated. Respondents took about 30 minutes on average to fill in the questionnaire during the first wave, and 25 minutes during the second and third wave. The final measurement was meant as a brief check-up after the elections and therefore only contained 5 questions. All questionnaires were administered online.

The variables measured range from the dependent variables political engagement, political knowledge, and political attitudes to standard socio -demographic control variables like education and age. Other important control variables are parental and peer influence, political norms, and political experiences. The variable which was measured in most detail is the main independent variable in this dissertation: media use. The questionnaire contains a set of questions that tap into general media use and access to media (internet access at different locations, whether or not their parents are or were subscribed to a newspaper). Furthermore, a total of 27 news outlets – online, televised, or in print – were presented to the respondents.

For each of these outlets respondents reported their usage per days in a typical week. Moreover, I collected data on their online activities, how attentive they used the news, and on their interpersonal communication about politics.

Sample

The survey was carried out by the Dutch opinion institute Gfk, which also provided the sample. To arrive at a sample representative for the population (Dutch adolescents 15 to 18 years old at the beginning of the survey), a light quota sample was drawn from their database, which is representative of the Dutch population. The quotas we applied were age (15 to 18), gender, and education. For specifics on each measurement see Table 1.

Table 1.1: Fieldwork data per wave

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 4
N	1653	1186	888	746
Field period	6/16/2010 – 7/10/2010	6/16/2011 – 7/10/2011	6/14/2012 – 7/3/2012	9/14/2012 – 9/24/2012
Attrition rate	-	28%	25%	16%

Panel attrition did not lead to a significant change in the composition of the panel with regard to key demographic variables age, gender, and education.

Outline of this dissertation

The empirical studies presented in the next chapters of this dissertation all contribute to answer the key question whether and how media use influences the process of political socialization. Therefore, each study investigates a different aspect of the analytical model introduced above, focusing on specific dependent variables and causal mechanisms. The line of arguing in this dissertation leads from broad to specific. Whereas I analyze very general

effects of media use in the first study, the last study investigates the effects of a specific TV program, which was specifically designed to reach and mobilize the youth.

As mentioned above Chapter 2 is based on data of the European Social Survey and serves the purpose of placing the subsequent studies into context. In this study I zoom into the subject by comparing Dutch adolescents, the group investigated in chapters 3 to 5, in two ways: by looking at multiple political and media systems and comparing media effects on adults and adolescents within these systems. The main dependent variables in this study are political attitudes and political engagement. In this chapter the causal mechanisms is tested rather crudely, which is mainly a consequence of data constraints.

The dynamics of the causal mechanism between political outcome variable and media use, however, is detailed in chapter 3, using the example of political knowledge. By relying on panel data and Structural Equation Modeling I provide evidence that the relationship between political knowledge and news media use is best described as a mutually reinforcing spiral.

In Chapter 4 I disentangle the effect of different media sources. TV, print and Internet news are analyzed separately to find out whether one source is more influential than the other. In particular online media are in the focus of this study. I distinguish between traditional unidirectional news sources and interactive platforms allowing to discuss politics or even get engaged straight away. Moreover, I provide evidence that the causal mechanism between media use and political participation is mediated by internal political efficacy, the feeling that one is informed enough and capable to participate in the political process.

In the final empirical chapter I take the argument beyond the status quo and analyze how a strategic design of a political information program can contribute to political mobilization of the young. The study investigates whether integrating content and stylistic

features in a political information program, which appeal to a young taste, can inspire the audience to become more active in the political world.

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Chapter 2: The differential role of the media as an agent of political socialization in Europe

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This chapter was published in the European Journal of Communication[2]

Abstract

Declining political involvement of adolescents in Western society has caused wide concerns about the health of democracy in the future. This study investigates the role of the media in the formation of political attitudes and political mobilization of adolescents. Based on a secondary data analysis of the European Social Survey (n=5657), the influence of exposure to news and entertainment content on political trust, signing petitions, and consumer politics is assessed in a multi-level regression analysis. Additionally, the impact of the political and educational system on political attitude formation and civic engagement of adolescents is investigated. The results show a higher level of engagement in countries with a well-functioning democracy. At the individual level, news media exposure is positively related to engagement in consumer politics, whereas exposure to entertainment is negatively related to mobilization.

[2] Moeller, J., & de Vreese, C. (2013) The differential role of the media as an agent of political socialization in Europe. *European Journal of Communication, 28*(3), 309-325. doi: 10.1177/0267323113482447

The media, most notably television and the Internet, have a considerable impact on the lives and political development of adolescents. A teenager today spends on average 8 hours a day using media (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). By doing so, he or she potentially learns about current events, becomes acquainted with the actors of the national and international political arena, and is introduced to expert evaluations (Graber, 1997). These are important ingredients of the socialization process towards becoming a political citizen. But this only happens if he or she chooses to do so in the abundance of choice in today's media landscape (see Prior, 2007). It is the aim of this chapter to investigate how and to what degree media influence the political socialization of adolescents.

Young adults, their media use, and the potential consequences of the latter on their political preferences and behavior are frequently studied in the social sciences. However, most studies refrain from studying the phenomenon from a socialization perspective and differences in political attitudes between adolescents and adults are interpreted mostly as cohort effects (Mößner, 2006; Niedermayer, 2006; Patterson, 2007). In fact, the literature devoted to the influence of the media as an agent of political socialization is relatively small. Following the pioneering work by Chaffee and colleagues in the 1970s (see Chaffee and Young 1990 for an overview of their work) the topic has virtually been absent from the scholarly agenda, with recent exceptions such as Shah, Cho, Eveland & Kwak (2005). In the meantime the media landscape has changed profoundly and so has our understanding of civic engagement (Ward & de Vreese, 2010) and socialization processes, as I explained in Chapter 1. In contrast to socialization studies conducted in the 1970ties, children and adolescents are now conceptualized as active participants in their own political upbringing. From this perspective media influence should not be regarded as an outside force. Media use should better be understood as a conscious choice of adolescents that has an impact on their political attitudes and behavior (Buckingham, 1997).

Extant research linking media use of young adults and potential effects on political behavior and attitudes is mostly based on single country studies, thereby ignoring the impact of contextual factors, even though these factors are highly relevant in explaining voting in general (Franklin et al, 1992) and political engagement in particular (Pacheco, 2008). Moreover, most extant studies rely on a relatively limited notion of media use, not taking into account the abundance of choice that today's media market offer. This is important since choice may lead people to turn away from news and prefer entertainment content (Prior, 2007). Finally, much of our current knowledge rests on a classic but limited conceptualization of civic engagement. Young persons may turn out less at the polls. But, as Norris (2003b) points out, a shift from a citizen oriented engagement (voting, supporting a political party through voluntary work or donations) to cause oriented activism which includes consumer politics and legal as well as illegal demonstrations could have taken place.

The study investigates the effect of media use on political attitudes and behavior, and it extends previous research on the citizen-oriented repertoire of civic engagement (voting, party preference), to also include new, cause-oriented forms of participation and a general outlook on politics. The analysis presented in this chapter is based on data of the European Social Survey, a large dataset collected in 22 countries that include measures of media use and political attitudes and behavior, which provides the unique opportunity to study macro- and micro level effects at the same time.

Conceptualizing Political Socialization

Political socialization is a concept that was widely studied and discussed in the 1960s and 1970s by e.g. Almond and Verba (1963) and Sigel and Hoskin (1981). Gimpel et al. (2003) integrated the various conceptualizations and defined political socialization as "the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to support of the political system". Hence, political

socialization has an explicit learning component. Learning what an individual has to know, to feel, and do to become a citizen that is needed in a particular political system. In the case of most Western countries the political system is democracy

Socialization is a complex and continuous process in which cognitions and behavioral patterns are actively learnt through agents, such as parents, school and peers. Though the most important period for socialization is childhood and early adulthood, we keep on negotiating our socialization throughout the life course as the political world changes and we need to acquire new patterns of behavior to deal with it (Sears & Levy, 2003).

A new political culture?

Gimpel et al.'s definition of political socialization refers to the term political culture as the object of political socialization, thus the collective attitude towards politics and the expression of those attitudes. However, the political culture of a system is not stable, but changes continuously as the societal parameters are transforming around it. The conceptualization of political culture in Western democracies is regularly debated and reassessed. Buckingham (1997) proposes that we are at the dawn of a "new political culture", in which traditional, institutionalized acts of expressions of citizenship (as voting, engagement in political parties) are replaced by involvement in short-term political alliances that are solely created to support a specific interest (e.g. prevent war in Iraq, protect the environment, rally against Wall Street capitalism), and dissolve after the issue solved or not any longer of political relevance (Norris, 2003b).

This development is important with regard to political socialization research for two reasons: first, it means that the political involvement of an adolescent cannot only be assessed by his or her intention to turn out and vote in an election or proximity to a political party, but also, and maybe even more importantly, by the engagement of a young person in cause-oriented initiatives. Secondly, engaging in the new political culture can be done at any age

and is not institutionally linked to the moment when adolescents legally become adults. Engagement in cause-oriented political activism is not limited by institutional obstacle like a minimum voting age and can therefore be studied during adulthood. Hence, if one wants to research the civic engagement of teenagers before they are eligible to vote, it is a worthwhile undertaking to consider the cause-oriented forms of political involvement, e.g. the conscious boycott of products for political reasons, or signing petitions instead of the citizen-oriented repertoire of expressions of citizenship.

Attitudes towards politics

Political mobilization of adolescents is only one aspect of their introduction into the political culture of their country. According to Gimpel et al's definition of political socialization, the development of attitudes supporting the current political system is another relevant factor of the phenomenon. Research in political developmental psychology indicates that the process of development of those attitudes begins in a very abstract form with diffuse identification with political actors and institutions during preschool years. Van Deth et al. (2007) show, for example, that German children at the age of 6, already dispose over a general idea what a democracy is and are familiar with democratic values like equality before the law. Such perspectives dovetail with recent insights focusing on personality traits (Mondak et al., 2010) and genetics (Hatemi et al., 2010) as antecedents of political ideology and participation.

During adolescence these vague allegiances become more pronounced when children slowly develop a rational approach towards politics (Atkin & Gantz, 1978). Attitudes towards politics do not only crystallize and become more concrete during adolescence, they also become increasingly independent from their parents political attitudes and preferences (see Chaffee and Yang, 1990). Moreover, political preferences developed during adolescence remain mostly stable over the course of life (Sears & Levy, 2003). Object of these attitudes

can be specific political figures, institutions, or policies, but it can also be the political system itself. In this chapter I am going to investigate both: whether an individual reports proximity to a political party (as one of the main actors in a democracy), and the trust an adolescent has in the various institutions that constitute the political system.

Media and political socialization

The development of political attitudes as well as political behavior is influenced by several agents, one of them being the media (see McLeod, 2010). According to political socialization theory, political attitudes are formed during childhood and adolescence and only to a small degree during adulthood (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001). Media effects research has also emphasized that investigating attitude formation processes at young ages is advantageous. It has been coherently shown that the prevalent effect of media exposure is to reinforce pre-existing attitudes. This is due to self-selection mechanisms: media users prefer selecting outlets that are likely to be consistent with their preferences to avoid psychological stress (Slater, 2007).

However, most empirical studies in the field of media effects research focus on mass media influence on the political attitudes of *adults*, who already dispose over a developed set of political preferences. Contrary to this approach, this study investigates the influence of the media on adolescents.

Two causal mechanisms

To understand the impact of the media on political attitudes and behavior, it is necessary to consider the causal processes that link media exposure and political attitude formation. Two theoretical approaches can help to understand these mechanisms: Learning theory and media malaise. Whereas learning theory points to a positive impact of (news-) media consumption on political socialization, media malaise theorists claim that the media contribute to rising levels of political cynicism.

Learning theory

Media are the primary source of political information on current political events for adolescents (Graber, 1997). For adolescents and adults alike, it is virtually impossible to witness all relevant political events in person, let alone discuss their implications with all concerned parties to place them into an interpretative framework. Political information is therefore evidently second-hand information, and the media are the most accessible and commonly used source for it. In that light, it cannot surprise that Dalton (1996) and Inglehart (1990) both find a strong correlation between the availability of political information through mass media and the overall level of political knowledge on the macro level (see also Curran et al., 2009). They claim that the expanded availability of media, especially in the second half of the 20th century, has led to an increase in the spread of political knowledge.

Exposure to political information increases in turn the ability of individuals to engage in politics (Delli Carpini 2000), as news provide information about current events that ask for participation and clarify the processes in a democratic society (see also Shah et al., 2009). This relationship is further explored in Chapter 4. Accordingly, ceteris paribus, I propose the following hypothesis.

H1: The higher the exposure to news media, the higher the civic engagement.

Media Malaise

Contrasting claims of learning theory, advocates of media malaise expect a negative influence of the mass media on political interest and engagement. The core notion of this approach is that media coverage is inherently negative about politics. This is due to higher news value of negative news items (Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007; Galtung & Ruge, 1965). As a common sense journalistic doctrine puts it: “bad news is good news”. News items that reveal scandals in the political world criticize the performance of those in power or alert to unfavorable consequences of particular decisions, appeal more to the interest of the

audience as news stories that inform about the success of particular policies or the number of politicians that are scandal-free[3]. Positive information about politics is considered to be less relevant or interesting. This brings about a negative bias in the portrayal of politics in the news media (Kepplinger, 1998), which ultimately gives the audience the impression, that politicians act irresponsibly most of time and therefore cannot be trusted (Capella & Jamieson, 1997).

Interestingly, media malaise theory has not been empirically substantiated by investigating the effects of exposure to *news* media, but for *general* media use (e.g. by Putnam, 2000). Exposure to news media, on the other hand, has been shown to have positive influence on political interest (Strömbäck & Shehata, 2010) and political involvement (Newton, 1999; Norris, 2003a). Holtz-Bacha (1990) stated explicitly, that higher levels of political cynicism are not associated with exposure to political information in the mass media but entertainment media. The negative relationship of entertainment media use and political involvement can be explained by potential cultivating effects of mass media, first conceptualized by Gerbner (1986). According to the cultivation approach, the media usually present a violent world in which danger is omnipresent. The audience, confronted with this biased image of reality, is left with a feeling of discomfort and insecurity, which results in a general alienation from the world, especially among those people who spend most of their leisure time using the media. The feeling of insecurity is paired with a feeling of inefficacy apathy and distrust (Putnam, 2000) towards society, in particular the political system.

General alienation from the political world also leads to growing levels of political cynicism and a decline in civic engagement (Putnam, 2000). This means, that exposure to

3 Negativity is one of the news values, implying that events with negative implications are more likely to be picked up by the media than events with positive consequences. See also Galtung & Ruge (1965).

entertainment media can have demobilizing effects. Accordingly I can formulate the following hypothesis:

H2: The higher the exposure to entertainment media, the lower the level of political trust and civic engagement.

Influence of system level variables

Sigel and Hoskin (1981) introduced the idea that the *political system* can affect processes of political socialization. They claim that the smoother a democratic system functions the less adolescents engage in politics. The rationale behind this idea is that adolescents – occupied with their education, social and romantic endeavors and important choices concerning their professional future – prefer to spend their attention on other aspects of their lives than their political environment. If they feel that there is little need for their political input it is a rational choice to save scarce time and other resources. In other words, an adolescent only becomes Aristotle's famous political animal in when his or her live is significantly blemished by his political environment.

The quality of democracy varies greatly among countries in Europe. Although the polity structure of all European countries is democratic, there are considerable differences in the degree to which they are able to achieve democratic goals: high levels of public health, education and wealth (Campbell, 2008).

H3: The higher the quality of democracy in the country in which adolescents live, the lower the level of civic engagement.

Methods

To understand the influence of the media on political socialization I conducted an analysis of the first five rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS), carried out in 2002,

2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 respectively.[4] The ESS is a general population survey carried out in about 22 countries in each wave among a representative sample of approximately 2000 respondents per round and country.[5] The countries included in this analysis are Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and UK. I selected all respondents that are at least 14 and at the most 20 years old as the bases for my analysis[6]. Since I did not find significant differences in the dependent variables between the rounds, all data is combined for further analysis (N=6935). I am investigating two types of dependent variables in this study: political attitudes and civic engagement.

Dependent Variables

Attitudes towards politics

Party affiliation: Proximity to a political party was assessed by asking the respondents whether they felt closer to a particular party compared to all other political parties.

Political trust: In this study we investigate political trust as the opposite of political cynicism. Though these concepts are not equivalent, political trust has been used as a measure of media malaise in comparable studies (Avery, 2009) and is therefore chosen as an indicator

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[5] The ESS has not been carried out in , Estonia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Greece in the wave of 2002, in Bulgaria in the waves of 2002 and 2004; in Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg in the wave of 2006, and in Austria in the wave of 2008 and 2010. Since we did not find significant differences between the waves and sufficient data was available for the other waves we chose to include those countries in the analysis nevertheless.

6 Adolescence is the period in life in which an individual starts to become increasingly independent from the political ideas and preferences of their parents. This process starts after the 12th birthday. (Dennis, 1986). To dispose over a sufficiently large sample size in each country, we decided to include all adolescents in the sample and chose for a rather large age bracket. To account for the potential risks, we additionally controlled for age.

in this study. Political trust is measured by a scale constructed of 5 items that individually measure the respondents trust in the national parliament, the legal system, the police, politicians, and political parties (Cronbach's Alpha: 0.869). All items were measured on an 11 point scale.

Civic engagement

Political involvement of adolescents is measured by two indicators of cause-oriented activism, as voting or other forms of citizen-oriented engagement is not relevant for the age group. They are signing a petition in the past 12 months, and boycotting a product for political reasons in the past 12 months.[7]

Independent Variables

Media exposure

News exposure is operationalized as the number of hours a respondents spends on an average weekday reading newspapers, watching television news, or listen to political information on the radio. As each of those channels was assessed independently, they are summed up to assess the cumulative amount of time spend with news media each day. **Entertainment exposure** is assessed in a comparable manner. The ESS does not include measures of entertainment exposure, but it has a measure of general media exposure. To calculate entertainment exposure news exposure is subtracted from the number of hours spent with a particular medium in total on an average weekday. Subsequently all the individual entertainment scores are added up to assess the cumulative amount of time spend with entertainment media every day. That means that the measure for media entertainment also

[7] We prefer to investigate two specific types of political behavior rather than constructing a scale, because the individual political activities differ so much with regard to the necessary level to involvement, costs, and goals that it would not be valid to construct an additive scale. The correlation of the two variables is .31.

includes advertising or educational formats. Both measures are weakly correlated (r= -0.2**)[8].

Quality of democracy

Quality of democracy is assessed using the quality of democracy ranking (Campbell, 2008). In this index a number of dimensions of functioning democracies are combined (political freedom, economic performance, health system, gender equality, general political knowledge, environmental performance, corruption). The empirical bases for the index are reliable and established sources such as the Freedom House Index of political freedom, World Bank, Political Handbook of the world. I chose this measure as it is able to grasp differences in the functioning of mature democracies in Europe, that most other measures of democracy (Freedom House, Vanhanen's Index of Democracy) cannot assess.

Control Variables

To specify the model and avoid overestimation of the effects a number of control variables were added that have been positively tested to be of empirical relevance in previous research (for example by Esser & de Vreese, 2007; Gimpel et al., 2003; Norris, 2003b; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). **Political interest**[9] was measured on a 4 point scale as a response to the

8 To make sure both measures are independent of each other despite the indirect manner in which entertainment media use is assessed, we calculated all analyses without the measure for entertainment. Though the power of the effect of news increased, it did not change the level of significance of the measure.

9 The political interest of an adolescent is an odd factor in political socialization research as it can serve as dependent and independent variable at the same time. In Norris (2003b) study of youth activism it turned out to be the most important factor in explaining political engagement. Esser and de Vreese (2007) come to a similar conclusion with regard to youth turnout. Political interest is also proven to have a positive impact on exposure to political information, as those who are interested in politics also want to be up to date on current political developments. On the other hand, one could also argue that political interest comes about as a combination of influences from media, family, school, peers, and the political environment. In this chapter, however, political interest is included as an independent variable in the models, mostly to estimate the influence of the media, when political interest is controlled.

question: “How interested are you in politics?”, **educational level** was measured in years of education[10], **ideology** of the respondents was assessed by a self-reported placement of the respondent on a 11 point left-right scale (10=right). Finally **age** and **gender** were added as control variables.

Unfortunately, the setup of the ESS as a survey which mostly directed at adults means that there are a number of limitations in the data. This particularly holds for the control variables. Important control variables like the *household income* could not be included in the model as the vast majority of the sample of adolescents did not know the household income,

To provide a reference point for the results as called for by Roller et al. (2006), I compare the results concerning the political attitudes and behavior of adolescents with the remainder of the sample.

Results

Political attitudes and engagement change during the life course. This is a result of both age and cohort effects. Figure 2.1 shows to what degree respondents of different ages are politically involved. As it becomes clear from Figure 2.1 the development varies between different modes of political involvement. The affiliation with a political party, for example, slowly increases with age, whereas participation in consumer politics peaks during adulthood. Taking a closer look on the specific development of adolescents, it becomes clear that adolescence is a crucial period for political socialization: the share of adolescents feeling close to a particular party steeply increases, whereas political trust is declining considerably. At the same time news media are increasingly becoming part of the media menu.

10 Not completed primary education, primary or first stage of basic, lower secondary or second stage of basic education, upper secondary, post secondary, non-tertiary, first stage of tertiary, second stage of tertiary

Figure 2.1: Mean values of news exposure, attitudes towards politics, and civic engagement by age

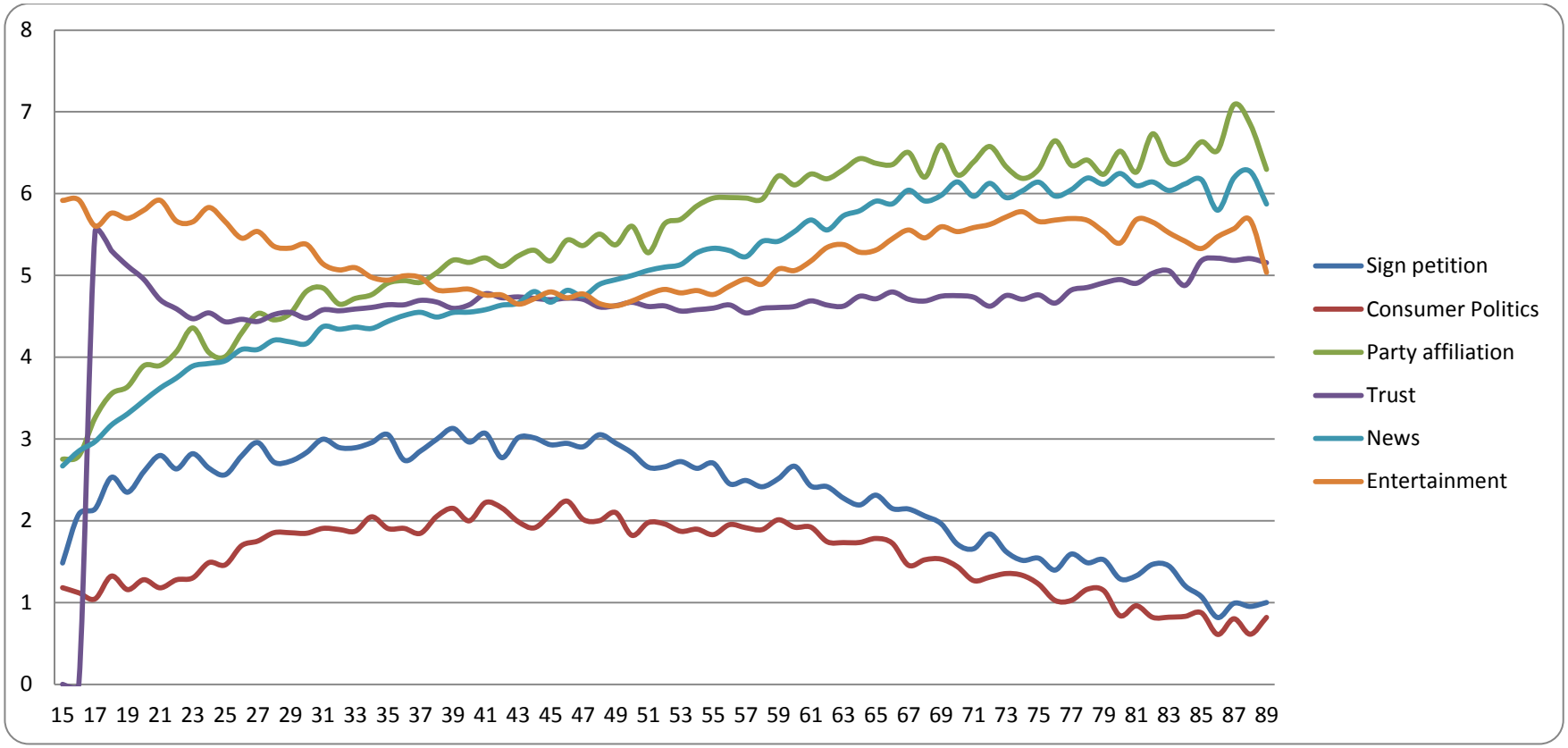

Figure 2.1: Mean value of media exposure (in hours), political engagement and political attitudes (on a 0 to 10 scale) by age.

Explanatory results

To assess the influence of the media on political attitudes and behavior of adolescents multi level regression analysis explaining each of the independent variables above was applied. Logistic regression was applied in the analysis of political engagement. Political trust was analyzed by applying linear MLE regression. To account for country differences a random intercept was added. To provide a reference point for the results, each model is also calculated for respondents older than 21. This way, I can assess whether a certain finding is particular for adolescents or coherent with a general trend.

Table 2.1: Fixed effects estimates for Models of the Predictors of political attitudes

	Party affiliation		Political trust	
	14-20 (N=5481)	21+ (N=92547)	14-20 (N=4178)	21+ (N=92547)
System level				
Quality of democracy	-.002* (.014)	.005 (.01)	.01 (.002)	.10 (.01**)
Individual level				
Age	.01(.02)	.01** (.0004)	-.16** (.011)	-.001** (.0003)
Gender	-.12** (.060)	-.09** (.014)	.009 (.040)	.06** (.012)
Political interest	.86** (.044)	.67** (.01)	.28** (.032)	.35** (.008)
Education	.06** (.021)	.01** (.002)	.03 (.010)	.02** (.001)
Ideology	.01 (.015)	.008* (.003)	.03** (.018)	.06* (.002)
News exposure	.005(.017)	.002 (.003)	.01 (.013)	-.009** (.002)
Entertainment exp	-.01 (.010)	-.007** (.002)	-.01$^{(*)}$ (.008)	-.01** (.002)
ESS Round	.01 (.02)	-.02** (.005)	.09 (.022)	-.004 (.998)
Intercept	-3.14** (.413)	-2.64** (.777)	-.2.97** (.095)	-5.14** (.998)
Wald chi^2	476.24**	7311.23**	162.81**	415.82**

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

* p < 0.5, ** p < 0.1

Table 2.2: Fixed effects estimates for Models of the Predictors of civic engagement

	Signed petition		Consumer politics	
	14-20 (N=5574)	21+ (N=94454)	14-20 (N=5567)	21+ (N=93502)
System level				
Quality of democracy	.10** (.016)	.01* (.001)	.06** (.015)	.08** (.012)
Individual level				
Age	.01 (.028)	-.01** (.0005)	.01 (.036)	-.008** (.0006)
Gender	.29** (.067)	.28** (.016)	.47** (.085)	.27** (.018)
Political interest	.53** (.048)	.40** (.011)	.54** (.059)	.47** (.012)
Education	.09** (.024)	.06** (.002)	.03 (.031)	.07** (.002)
Ideology	-.06** (.017)	-.07** (.003)	-.10** (.021)	-.08** (.004)
News exposure	-.009 (.020)	.01** (.003)	-.007 (.020)	.01** (.003)
Entertainment exp.	-.03** (.012)	-.02** (.002)	-.04** (.015)	-.04** (.003)
ESS round	-.08** (.024)	-.02 (.005)	-.03 (.29)	.002 (.006)
Intercept	-11.67** (1.41)	-8.12** (.961)	-8.84** (1.39)	-10.13** (1.00)
Wald chi2	279.50	489.12**	196.15**	4646.71**

Note: Standard errors are in parentheses.

* $p < 0.5$, ** $p < 0.1$

Tables 2.1 and 2.2 present the findings of the analysis. The results reveal that, depending on the dimension of political socialization under investigation – behavior or attitude -, a different set of factors is significant for the explanation of its variance. This observation becomes particularly clear when looking at the influence of the two types of media exposure: exposure to news media and exposure to entertainment media. In most cases, the effects of news exposure and entertainment exposure do not coincide, but are complementary.

Media effects

Hypothesis 1 states a positive influence of *news* media exposure on civic engagement, whereas Hypothesis 2 postulates a negative influence of entertainment media exposure on both types of dependent variables: civic engagement and attitudes towards politics. The results indicate that the direction of the effects is indeed in line with the hypotheses in most cases, however not all of the effects are significant. Exposure to news only has a statistical significant effect on the likelihood to boycott a product for political reasons or sign a petition but not for adolescents. Those effects were only significant for older respondents, which means that Hypothesis 1 is not supported. The negative effect of other media exposure on political attitudes and behavior (H2), on the other hand, can be confirmed for adolescents with regard to participating in politics as well as trusting politicians.

The overall tendency of the variables can also be deducted from a visual examination of the predicted scores depending on a low, high or medium level of media exposure (Figure 2).

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Figure 2.2: Predicted scores of low, medium, or high media exposure

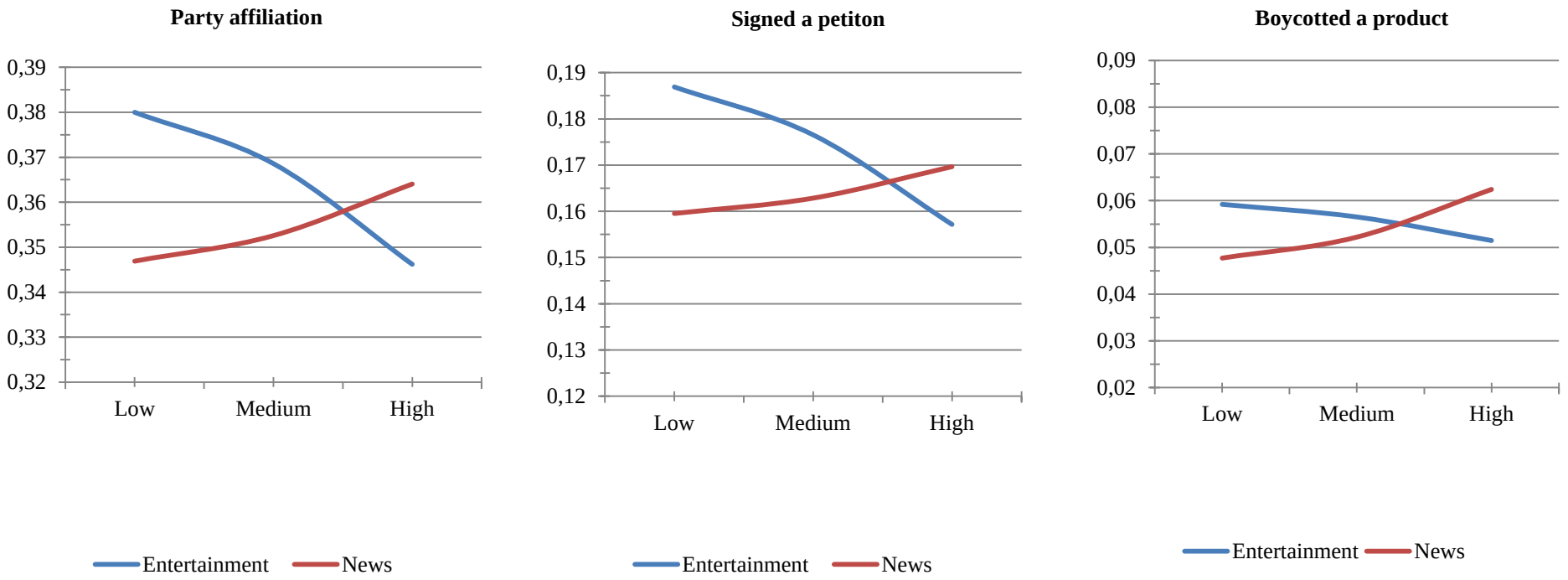

Figure 2.2: Predicted scores of low, medium and high media exposure in a logistic multi-level regression. All other variables are set to mean. For all specifications see Table 1 & 2**.**

When comparing the younger cohort to the 34 to 40 cohort it becomes obvious that the mobilizing influence of news media is higher in the older cohort. While I do not find significant effects of exposure to news on consumer politics or signing a petition in the younger cohort, they are evident for the older cohort. This observation could be substantiated using moderation analysis, in which I found significant interaction effects consisting of age and news exposure (Beta: sign petition: .001**, Beta: consumer politics:.001**).

There is also a significant interaction effect of age and entertainment media use in the model explaining political trust (Beta: -.001**). This means that spending more time with entertainment media leads to higher levels of distrust among the older generation. In case of proximity to a political party the opposite was the case. Here, the youngest respondents show the strongest effects (Beta: .005**).

On the system level I find that citizens who live in countries with a lower quality of democracy generally show a lower level of political activism, which means that Hypothesis 3 cannot be supported. On the contrary, I find significant in the opposite direction in most cases showing that stable democracies are more likely to bring about a politically active youth.

Discussion

In this chapter two questions concerning the relationship of media exposure and political socialization were addressed. The first question relates to the contradicting effects of entertainment exposure and news exposure. Whereas the latter has been proven to increase political knowledge and – in the long run – democratic participation of young adults in previous research, the first is presumed to contribute to media malaise, a sentiment of distrust in politics and politicians, nurtured by media products that present a violent, dangerous world.

The results suggest that both, mobilizing and demobilizing effects of the media depending on the content an individual is exposed to. Use of entertainment content contributes to a feeling of distrust in politics and leads to lower levels of political engagement

among adolescents, yet exposure to news media stimulates higher political participation, but only among those older than 21.

The second question posed in this study concerns the influence of the on civic engagement. The data suggests that there is a significant effect of quality of democracy on political attitudes and behavior. However, the direction of the predicted effects was not in the expected direction. Based on the work of Sigel and Hoskin (1981) I expected young citizens to be less involved in mature democracies. Yet, the results indicate that nations in which democracy is not functioning at its best – and not the mature democracies - leave their young citizens with little interest to engage. Possibly, because they feel that signing a petition or boycotting a product will not change anything as the political system is less responsive to the pressure of public opinion.

To test system level influence data of the European Social Survey is used. In the ESS survey data from over 22 European countries is gathered. Although the size of the data set and quality of data collection in the European Social Survey imply that my results are of high reliability, the data was not collected directly for the purpose of this study which means that validity of some of my measures should be discussed. First, the indicator of entertainment media use is rather crude. As it is an indirect measure calculated based on general media use and news media use, it includes more than just entertainment media use, for example advertising or educative media content and does not account for infotainment or other hybrid forms of political and entertainment content. Moreover, both indicators of media use are measures of exposure and not attentive media use as media malaise theory would suggest. Second, online political participation and media use are not included. That means that this study does not account for new forms of political participation, for example through social network sites, which are especially relevant for the young generation, as I point out in Chapter 4. However, since online and offline participation are correlated (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011),

explaining offline political participation is still worthwhile as it helps to identify sources of an active approach towards politics. Finally, measures of education and ideology are not assessed in an age appropriate fashion with regard to adolescents. This means that my results should be interpreted with caution acknowledging the limitations of the data.

To eventually fully identify the causal mechanism that relates media exposure and political socialization, research on the effects of the media on political socialization should move beyond a cross-sectional research design. Taking on a longitudinal approach would allow us to address some interesting questions that are still open: How does the influence of the media develop over time? At what age do adolescents develop stable attitudes? This would also allow contribute to political development psychology with regard to media effects. Until today, the timing of media effects during the life course is uncharted territory. Finally, do media mobilize adolescents or do mobilized adolescent select media that mobilize them even more? I will come back to this question in the next chapter.

The results showed that political trust is steeply declining during adolescence. According to my analysis the growing lack of confidence is fuelled by use of non-informational media. Exposure to entertainment media content also has a significant negative effect on political participation. Adolescents and adults alike are less inclined to sign political petitions or boycott a product for political reasons as they spend more time using entertainment media. I interpret this finding in the light of media malaise theory implying that it is violent or negative media content that alienates its audience from the political world. It could also be argued that the relationship of entertainment media use and lack of participation is due to limitations in the time budget (Putnam, 2000). Time spent using media individually, cannot be spend on political activities. However, two observations of this study cast doubt on this alternative explanation. First, the size of the negative effect remains the same during the life course; though time spend with entertainment media decreases on average. Second, there

is a significant negative influence of entertainment media use on political trust. That means that also the attitude towards politics is affected by entertainment media use.

When comparing media influence on political participation of adults and adolescents, it becomes apparent that the effects are more pronounced in the older cohort. Adolescence appears to be the period in life during which media malaise and political learning through media begins, but the effects of the media grows stronger over the life course. This is interesting to note, because adolescence is also the period in life with the highest exposure to media. Hence, one would expect that the media effects are the strongest. Yet, the opposite is the case.

There are two possible explanations for this finding: First, the effects of media use unfold over time, implying that not the frequency of news media use causes political participation but the cumulative amount of time spend with the media over the life course. An alternative explanation is that media become a more important source of influence relative to other sources, as other agents of socialization (parents, school) become less influential during adulthood. Whichever explanation holds, both illustrate that political learning theory should be further developed to incorporate life cycle effects. We should also investigate the development of media effects in young adults as they first occur in order to find out more about how the relationship between media use and political mobilization comes about.

The difference in the effect of news media between adolescents and adults can be interpreted as both, a cohort or an age effect. I suggest that cumulative media consumption during the life course affects political engagement. However, this does not mean that there are not be generational differences as well. In fact, literature in the field of political engagement research clearly suggests that one’s generation or cohort is crucial in determining political participation, for example if there was high political conflict during the first election of a generation (Sears & Valentino, 1997).

Multi-level analysis of the data showed that political socialization is influenced by factors on the macro level and factors on the micro level. Quality of democracy turned out to be very influential in bringing about active citizens in Europe. The higher the level of public health, wealth or education, the more young citizens feel inspired to take on an active role in society. This means that in order to socialize a participating citizenry, one place to start is by providing a functioning political environment.

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Chapter 3: Spiral of political learning. The reciprocal relationship of news media use and political knowledge among adolescents

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Manuscript under review

Abstract

This study investigates the dynamics of reciprocal influence of political knowledge and attentive news use. News media are an important source for political information and contribute to political learning. Yet, this process becomes more efficient with increasing levels of pre-existing knowledge about the political world. In extant literature mutual interdependence is often suggested, but empirical proof is scarce. I propose to conceptualize the relationship of knowledge and news use as a reinforcing upward spiral, implying that growth in either of the two factors leads to growth in the other. The model is tested on data from a three wave panel survey among 888 adolescents using growth curve modeling. The results support the model of a reinforcing spiral of political learning. Interestingly, the influence of political knowledge on news use is estimated to be higher than the other way round.

News media are essential for political learning. By covering events and developments in the political world news media contribute to the political knowledge of their audience. Political knowledge, on the other hand, is a powerful predictor of news use (Price & Zaller, 1993). In fact, knowing about politics is a precondition to make sense of news stories, because knowledge about political structures, actors and processes provides the context in which new information is processed. Without basic political knowledge new information remains meaningless. News use and political knowledge are therefore mutually interdependent. From a longitudinal perspective, mutual interdependence means that the process is ought to take the form of a self-reinforcing spiral, or in the words of Norris (2000), "a virtuous circle". In this chapter I analyze the dynamics of learning from news media in detail using data from a three wave panel survey study of 888 adolescents.

Panel survey data is well suited for this purpose and has several advantages over cross sectional survey data or experimental data. Cross sectional surveys assess whether and under which circumstances news use and political knowledge are correlated (e.g., Price & Zaller, 1993; Shah, McLeod, & Yoon, 2001), but cannot answer questions of causality or dynamics. In other words, these studies cannot provide definite answer to the question whether individuals become more knowledgeable by using news or knowledgeable individuals are more inclined to watch or read the news. Even though, some cross sectional studies, most prominently Norris (2000), conclude that the answer is that both processes are at work simultaneously, they cannot support this notion with adequate empirical data. It is the goal of this study to demonstrate that the relationship between political knowledge and news use is in fact more than a positive correlation, and rather a mutually reinforcing spiral. This is important for our future theorizing about this dynamic relationship.

Experiments, on the other hand, can clearly assess causality. The drawback of this approach is that they are conducted in a laboratory environment while forcing news exposure

(e.g. Eveland, Seo, & Marton, 2002). This casts doubts on the external validity of those studies. Moreover, effects found in experimental studies have only been measured over a very short term and might fade after a while. The foci of this study, however, are stable, long term developments in political knowledge. Therefore the analysis is based on data collected over period of two years.

Political knowledge is a key factor in becoming an engaged citizen. In democracies it is of vital importance that citizens understand the processes and structures of the political system around them to participate (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004). Any electoral decision can only be meaningful if voters have a general idea about candidates and the offices they are applying for. Moreover, political knowledge is also proven to have a positive impact on attitudes towards politics and participation. In fact, "no other single characteristic of an individual affords so reliable a predictor of good citizenship, broadly conceived, as their level of knowledge" (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996, 6). The more people know about politics, the more they are inclined to take on an active role in a democracy (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). An analysis of how young citizens learn about politics from the news media can therefore provide insight in the antecedents of how adolescents become active citizens. The relationship between political knowledge, the feeling to be informed and engagement is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Political learning from the news

It is evident that news media are an important source of political information and contribute to political learning (Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970b; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). However, as it is common for media effects, this is not a straightforward, stimulus-response process. Political learning is a complex procedure, that is conditional upon a multitude of factors: starting from the information environment on the system level (Elenbaas, de Vreese, Schuck, & Boomgaarden, in press; Prior, 2007) to features of the media that transport political information (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Weaver & Drew, 2001). Yet, the most important determinants of political learning reside on the individual level (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). The reason behind the dominance of individual characteristics is that political learning is in nature a psychological process that consists of a number of cognitive steps (Sotirovic & McLeod, 2004)

First, new information needs to be taken in. Mere exposure is not enough to guarantee an effect on political knowledge. Information also needs to comprehended and retained (Price & Zaller, 1993). The importance of this step cannot be stressed enough. Graber (1997), showed that most TV news users cannot remember most of the items they saw on the news broadcast , not to speak of any details of the news stories. In explaining whether a news story is remembered or not, individual motivation plays a key role (Elenbaas, de Vreese, Schuck, & Boomgaarden, in press)

Second, mental representations of the information needs to be formed and these representations need to be linked to existing representations and schemata. In this context pre-existing mental representations of political actors, structures and processes are of vital importance. The more cognitive networks and schemata already exist, the easier it is to connect and organize new information. Furthermore, individual cognitive abilities determine how much information can be processed (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Third, new information needs to be reflected and deliberated. In order to enter the long term memory, new information needs to be recalled several times. Interpersonal communication about the subject plays can play an important role in this process, so can repeated exposure (Higgins, 1996).

When looking at the process of political learning from the news in detail, in becomes apparent that it cannot be independent from pre-existing political knowledge (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986). Especially, when considering the ability to link new information into a network of schemata, it is quite clear how essential political knowledge in the acquisition of new political knowledge actually is. To take this argument one step further, pre-existing political knowledge is in fact a precondition to use the news at all. Without it obtained information remains meaningless, and there is no need to tune in.

But pre-existing political knowledge also factors in the motivation to retain information. First of all, because individuals who are motivated to follow the news are likely to be politically interested and knowledgeable in the first place (Elenbaas, de Vreese, Schuck, & Boomgaarden, in press). Second, because knowing about political processes and events that are taking place at a time, makes following the development of this process or event more attractive and relevant (Chang & Krosnick, 2003).

Extant research has shown that efficient information processing is more likely among news users with specific social economic background characteristics. Among them are social economic status (Jerit, 2009), gender (Mondak & Anderson, 2004), formal education (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000) , and composition of the social network (Hively & Eveland, 2009). Yet, the very same factors are also predictors of news use and general political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996). This implies that it is the same group of people that a) watches and reads the news, b) is able to understand and process information they came across, and c) has a high level of political knowledge. This leads to a gap in political

knowledge that divides citizenry in those who know and understand politics and those who don't, which has serious implications for democratic societies (Tlichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970).

Towards a dynamic model of learning from the news

As I have established in the previous section, political knowledge and attentive news use are mutually interdependent. Higher levels of political knowledge makes news seem more accessible and relevant and provide a framework to make sense of the obtained information. Using the news, on the other hand, is an important source for political learning, at least if new information in the news is retained and processed.

When taking on a longitudinal perspective it can be argued that what is conceptualized as mutual interdependence at a specific point in time, is in fact an upward spiral. Someone who knows already a fair amount about politics, becomes more attracted to news and is more likely to use it attentively in the future. Following the news attentively leads to rising levels of political knowledge over time. In its structure this spiral resembles the spiral dynamics of selective exposure proposed by Slater (2007). If this theory holds, than the difference in political knowledge between those in the upward spiral and those who are not, should become larger over time. Three hypotheses can be deduced from this notion.

H1: Growth in political knowledge has a positive impact on growth in news use

H2: Growth in news use has a positive impact on growth in political knowledge

H3: The process of growth in news use and growth in political knowledge is mutually interrelated.

Studies of knowledge gains have found evidence on specific aspects of this model. For example, Tlichenor, Donohue, & Olien, (1970) demonstrated that coverage of an issue widens the gap in knowledge about this issue, in one of the earliest studies on media related knowledge gaps. Those who knew about an issue beforehand learned more from coverage

than those who didn't. Norris (2000), demonstrated that political knowledge and news use are positively correlated based on multiple data sets reaching from European Election data to the U.S. National Election Survey, but causality or dynamics are not tested. Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak (2005) did test the causal relationship between political knowledge and news use in a two wave panel study, and concluded that a model of unidirectional influence of news use best describes the phenomenon. However, their study differs from this study in a number of aspects. Most importantly, the study is specific to an American presidential campaign. Political knowledge was defined as factual knowledge about issue placements of the two candidates and media use as exposure to campaign related information. Second, the model used in this study is not a model that explains growth in either political knowledge or news use, but the level of knowledge at the second measurement. In this study, however, I analyze the phenomenon as a general causal mechanism that is not specific to a certain political event explaining growth during a two year time span and not the absolute level of knowledge. To do so I assess whether causal relationships in growth in political knowledge and news are still significant when the other growth process is controlled. In other words, a comprehensive model of a reinforcing spiral of political knowledge is being tested.

Political learning during adolescence

Adolescence is a key phase for political learning, as it marks the period in which the brain is sufficiently developed for abstract and complex thinking. During childhood political knowledge is restricted to the knowledge of symbols and a general idea of power, whereas young adults are able to grasp the complex processes and institutions of modern democracy (Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970). Moreover, late adolescence is also a period in which many young citizens face their first electoral decisions. This gives political information and political knowledge a new relevance in their lives and a reason to seek out information about politics

on news media (Sears & Valentino, 1997).Therefore, adolescence is not only a life phase in which political knowledge develops, but also in which political knowledge is likely to be influenced by news media (Jennings, 1996).

Although political learning in general occurs throughout the entire life course (Sears & Levy, 2003; Sigel & Hoskin, 1981), it is likely to be more pronounced among adolescents. Hence, it is more likely to find evidence for a reinforcing spiral within a two year time frame by using an adolescent sample.

Methods

In order to investigate the reciprocal influence of news use and political knowledge, I rely on a three wave panel survey conducted in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2012 among a sample of adolescents aged 15 to 18 at the beginning of the survey. The data was collected through CAWI. The data collection was funded in part by the Amsterdam School of Communication Research and in part by the Swiss Science Foundation within the framework of NCCR democracy.

Sample

The sample was drawn from a population representative database administered by a Dutch opinion poll institute, GfK, using a quota sample. The quotas used were age (15 to 18), gender, and education. 1653 respondents participated in the first wave (June 16th through July 10th 2011). 1186 of those respondents also participated in the second wave (June 16th through July 10th 2011). The attrition rate was 28%. The third wave took place from June 14th to July 3rd 2012. 888 respondents participated in the third wave, implying that the attrition rate was 25% from the second to the third wave

Those respondents who did not participate in all three waves did not differ significantly from the panel in terms of gender, age, and educational level.

Measures

News use. News exposure was measured using a combined measure of news exposure and attention to news[11].News exposure is measured as a cumulative scale of exposure to 22 Dutch news sources (TV, newspaper and online new sources). For each outlet the typical exposure per outlet interval is assessed and added up.[12] (M: 3.16; SD: 2.21). Attention to news was measured using a single item indicator on a seven point scale (M: 4.34; SD: 3.77)[13]. Attention to news and exposure were multiplied to create a combined indicator (M: 12.28, SD: 10.63).

Political knowledge. Political knowledge was measured using a sum scale of answers to four different questions testing for general knowledge about democratic society. These questions cover knowledge about important aspects of Western democracies like the function of political parties and international politics. The purpose of using rather general questions instead of more common knowledge checks (e.g., by recognition of politicians) was to tap long term knowledge gains that are important for the development of democratic citizens. The

[11] News exposure is combined with a measure of attention, because both of these factors of news use are essential to guarantee news processing (Chaffee & Schleuderer, 1986). In fact, attention to news measures have been proven to explain gains in political knowledge better than exposure as information that is not received attentively fades away quickly (Eveland 2002). Chang & Krosnick (2003) tested a combined measure of exposure and attention as a moderator for various media effects. The moderator, the combined measure, was found to be significant in all cases, whereas the main effects of attention and exposure became insignificant, implying that a combined measure is able to explain most of the variance that would be explained by the individual factors otherwise. For sake of parsimony we rely on a combined measure in the models. To guarantee robustness we conducted additional test using the individual measures.

[12] It is important to note that this is a cumulative scale not a factor. Some of the TV shows are being broadcasted at the same time, so it is virtually impossible to be exposed to both. A similar argument can be made for newspapers. If a respondents reads one paid newspaper it is unlikely he will buy another.

[13] We chose a general measure for news attention based on the research of Chaffee and Schleuder, 1986 who have tested a number of detailed attention to news measures, but could not find significant differences compared to a general attention measure.

questions were adapted from IEA Civic education studies. Each question was recoded into 1=correct answer and 0=wrong answer or don't know[14]. The recoded items were used to construct a scale (Cronbach's Alpha:.70; M: .27; SD: .02).

The same questions were used in all three waves to insure that the questions had the exact same level of difficulty. Given the long time span between measurements, it could be expected that respondents are likely to have forgotten the questions. To test panel sensitation a representative sample of 200 respondents in the same age group was asked the same questions during the fieldwork period in 2011. There was no significant deviance in their responses compared to panel members.

Covariates. Four covariates were used in the analysis; formal education, age, gender, and social economic status (SES). Data on age, gender, and formal education was provided by the research institute that carried out the field work. Formal education is assessed on a three point scale (low, middle and high education in secondary schools in the Netherlands). As we are dealing with an adolescent sample, education did not have to be completed at the time of the interview. Social economic status was assessed using a single item indicator in which respondents self-reported their social class on a five point scale (M: 3.53; SD: .01).

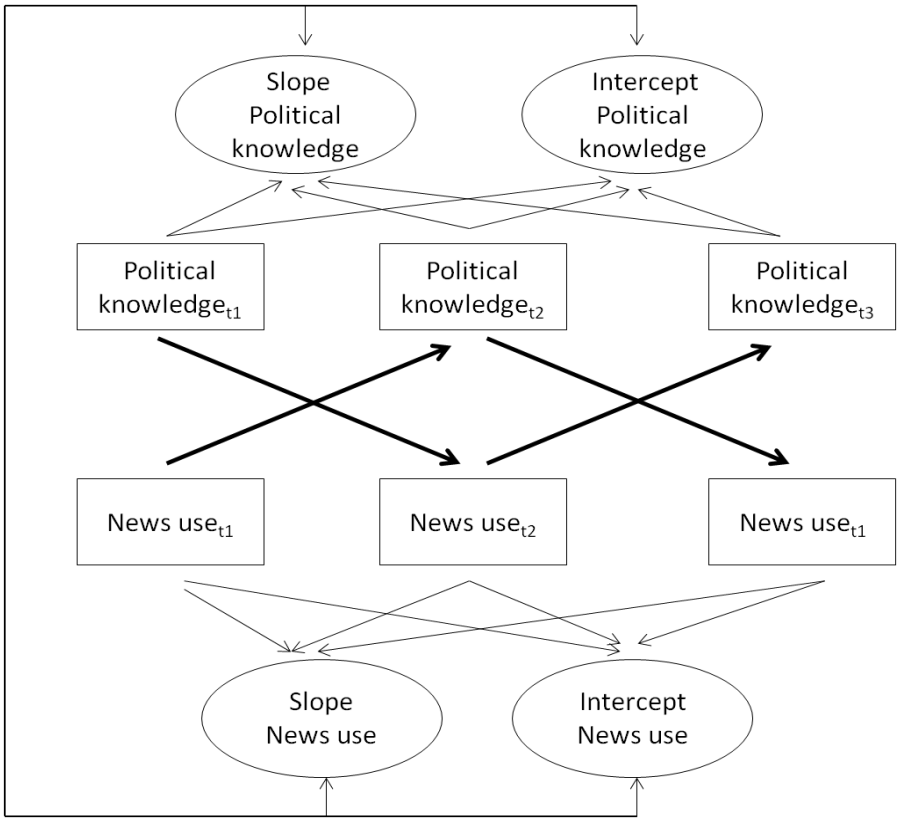
[14] The four questions were: 1) In democratic countries what is the function of having more than one political party? a) To represent different opinions interests in the Parliament; b) To limit political corruption c) To prevent political demonstrations d) To encourage economic competition e) Don't know (Recoded M: .68; SD: .007). 2) What is the major purpose of the United Nations? a) Safeguarding trade between countries b) Maintaining peace and security among countries c) Deciding where countries' boundaries should be d)Keeping criminals from escaping to other countries e)Don't know (Recoded M: .77; SD: .006); 3) The government has lowered tax rates on income from interest and investment (finance income) and raised tax rates on salaries. A large group carried signs in protest in front of the government's buildings. The protesters are most likely to be... a)people who have large savings accounts b)people who own shares in companies c)unemployed d)people who receive government benefits e)…people who are employed in factories f)Don't know (Recoded M: .50; SD: .007); 4) A country has a declining birth-rate and an increasing life span. Which of the following problems will have to be solved as a result? a)Schools need to be built b)Pensions for the elderly have to be financed c)Low income housings have to be built d)Crime and violence have to be fought e)Don't know (Recoded M: .77; SD: .006).

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the reciprocal influence of news use and political knowledge as a reinforcing spiral, two interrelated growth processes need to be modeled simultaneously. I rely on Structural Equation Modeling for this purpose. The model used is an adaption of the model used by Schemer (2012) to model a spiral of negative issue affects and campaign attention. In this model two parallel growth curves are estimated (Bollen & Curran, 2006). In a growth curve model, multiple measurements of the same indicator over time are used to model a latent intercept and a latent slope. The initial level of the dependent variables, political knowledge and news use, is modeled as a latent intercept. Intra individual variance in the dependent variables across waves is modeled as a latent slope (see Figure 1)[15].

[15] To model the latent intercept, the mean of the intercept of the individual indicators is constrained to zero and the regression weight of each of the paths between the indicators and their respective intercepts is set to 1. To model intra-individual linear growth the paths between the indicators and their respective slope are restricted to 1, 2, and 3. To account for autocorrelation the growth factors (latent slopes and latent intercept) are allowed to covary.

Figure 3.1. Analytical model of the reinforcing spiral of political knowledge and news use



Notes: The figure shows only the structural relationships between political knowledge and news use. The effects of covariates are considered but not depicted in the model. Residuals and correlations between residuals are also considered, but not shown.

Results

The model proposed fits the data well (*Chi square*: 13.71; *df*: 7; *p*: .55; *Comparative fit index* (*CFI)*: .996, *Root mean error square error of approximation* (*RMSEA)*: .033), implying that conceptualizing political learning from news as an interrelated growth process is appropriate according to my data. Before discussing the reciprocal measures, let me first describe the two growth processes of political knowledge and news use separately.

The mean of the slope of political knowledge is estimated to be .19**. This implies that political knowledge has grown significantly over the two year time span. The mean intercept of political knowledge is estimated to be 2.48. Keeping in mind that political knowledge is measured on a four point scale I can conclude that the initial level of political

knowledge is rather high. Intercept and slope of the political knowledge growth curve are significantly correlated (COV: -.10; SE. 49; p: .02). The direction of the correlation is negative. This means that individuals with a high level of political knowledge in wave 1 have obtained significantly less political knowledge than those with a low initial level of political knowledge. Given the high mean intercept of political knowledge, this is most likely a ceiling effect.

When inspecting the estimations for the growth curve of news use, the picture is different. The mean slope is positive, but not significant (M: .51; SE: .49; p: .43). This means that there has not been an increase in attentive news use, besides what can be explained by the of political influence knowledge. Again, I find a negative, significant correlation between intercept and slope of news use (COV: -16.85; SE: 3.43; p: <.01). That means that respondents who use a variety of news media regularly in the first wave are less inclined to expand their news menu.

The latent slopes of political knowledge and news use are not significantly correlated (COV: -.06; SE:.09; p: .51), but the latent intercepts are (COV: 2.12; SE:.81; p: <.01). The correlation of the initial levels of news use and political knowledge mean that the two variables are already dependent upon each other before my first measurement.

Turning to the cross causal paths and hypothesis testing, I find confirmation for most of the hypotheses (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Reciprocal influences of political knowledge and news use

Parameters	Estimates (SE)	Parameters	Estimates SE
Political knowledge$_{t1}$ → news use$_{t2}$	.40* (.182)	News use$_{t1}$ → political knowledge$_{t2}$	.004 (.003)
Political knowledge$_{t2}$ → news use$_{t3}$	.85** (.331)	News use$_{t1}$ → political knowledge$_{t2}$	.01* (.005)

Note: Unstandardized parameters, *p<05; **p<.01

Hypothesis 1 states a significant positive impact of political knowledge on news use. My findings support this hypothesis as there is a significant relationship between growth in political knowledge and growth in news use one year later. It is worth noting that the estimated influence seems to have doubled during one year.

Hypothesis 2 states a significant effect of growth in attentive news use on political knowledge. Here, the results are mixed. Whereas I do not a find a significant impact on news use on political knowledge one year later in the first wave, this path is estimated to be significant in the second wave. Eyeballing the results we see that like in the case of the influence of political knowledge, the size of the effect has doubled in the second wave.

With regard to the third hypothesis it can therefore concluded that growth in political knowledge and growth in attentive news use are interrelated. Yet, the influence of political knowledge is on news use is much stronger than the other way round. First, because political knowledge is consistently estimated to influence attentive news use in both time periods. Second, the level of significance is for this path is much stronger.

Four control variables were included in the analysis. Adding the control variables to the model did not change the results significantly. When looking at the effect of the control variables on the growth factors, a few interesting observations can be made. The initial level of political knowledge is influenced by all four control variables. Older, male, highly educated respondents, with a higher social economic status are predicted to have a higher

level of political knowledge at the start of the first wave. Yet, younger respondents are likely to learn more about politics during the two year time span. With regard to news use, the picture is slightly different. Older, female, higher educated respondents are estimated to have higher initial levels of news use. Those with a higher education are less likely to increase their use of news over time.

Table 3.2: Effects of control variables on the growth factors

	Intercept political knowledge	Slope political knowledge	Intercept news use	Slope news use
Sex	-.18**	.10	.10**	-.09
Age	.21**	-.23**	.12**	-.09
SES	.12**	.08	.16	.09
Education	.29**	-.12	.27**	-.25**

Note: Standardized parameters , *p<05; **p<.01

Robustness checks

Given the complex nature of measures and models presented in this chapter, a number of robustness checks have been performed to insure reliability of the results.

Random effects regression model. First, I calculated random effects models using either change in political knowledge or change in news use as dependent variable and the other factor as independent variable. Random effects regression estimation is a more conservative and reliable test of causal relationships. The disadvantage of this type of model is, however, that the interrelation of both factors cannot be tested simultaneously. The results of this test support my analysis. Attentive news use is estimated to have a significant effect on

political knowledge (Beta:.08** SE.01) and political knowledge is estimated to have a significant effect on attentive news use (Beta:.14** SE:.02)[16].

News exposure and attention to news. As I am using a combined measure of news use and attention to news, I tested whether the results hold up when both factors are tested independently. The results are mixed. I do find comparable results for models based on attention to news. (CFI: .97; RMSEA: .02). All relevant estimates that are significant in the combined model are also significant in a model based on attention to news only (w1 news→w2 political knowledge: Beta: .03$^{(*)}$ SE:.01, w2news→w3 political knowledge: Beta: .07; SE: .03, w1 political knowledge → w2 news: Beta: .75*; SE:.34, w2 political knowledge → w3 news: Beta: .15** SE: .06). In the model relying on exposure to news only (CFI: .98; RMSEA: .06) this is not the case. Here, I do find a significant impact of political knowledge on exposure to news, but exposure to news has no significant effect on political knowledge. (w1 news→w2 political knowledge: Beta: .03; SE: .06; w2news→w3 political knowledge Beta: .07; SE: .11; w1 political knowledge → w2 news: Beta: .23**; SE: .009, w2 political knowledge → w3 news: Beta: .46**; SE: .005). It should be noted, that in this model the correlation between the two slopes becomes significant, implying that the relationship between growth in exposure to news and growth in political knowledge is better described as a parallel process.

[16] Furthermore, I used SEM to test whether alternative causal paths would fit the data better than the proposed model. Yet, excluding the cross paths or estimating uni-directional effect models (only media effects or only knowledge effects) lead to a significantly worse model fit.

Discussion

In this chapter I set out to test the idea of a reinforcing spiral of political learning, to get a better understanding of the relationship found between political engagement and political information media use in Chapter 2. Extant studies on the relationship between news use and political knowledge have often concluded that growth in political knowledge and increase in attentive news use must be interrelated (Norris, 2000; Price & Zaller, 1993), but until now empirical proof is scarce. This study looks at the mutual interdependence from a longitudinal perspective. If the effects of political knowledge and news use are disentangled over time, they take the shape of a reinforcing spiral, which resembles the spiral of selective exposure put forward by Slater (2007).

The results support the conceptualization of a reinforcing spiral. However, according to the data, the two sides of the spiral are not equally powerful. Political knowledge is a much better predictor of future attentive news use than the other way round. Two conclusions can be drawn from this finding. First, the upward spiral of political learning can be entered at both ends. In order to stimulate political learning, it is effective to encourage young citizens to read or watch more news. Yet, it is probably even more efficient to spark the upward spiral at the end of political knowledge. The results imply that adolescents first need to have a general understanding of democratic institutions and democratic processes, before they are willing to follow the news attentively.

Second, we should be careful to over-interpret media effects on political knowledge in cross sectional studies. My findings suggest that causality in the relationship of political knowledge and news use goes in fact both ways, and more importantly, the reverse path is probably stronger. In other words, the commonly found correlation of political knowledge and news use (e.g. Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970; Norris, 2000); is rather a result of an increased interest in news of individuals with a high level of political knowledge, than a result of

political learning through news media. It is important to note that this also holds when covariates are included in the model.

By using an adolescent panel I intended to measure the antecedents of the upward spiral. At this age neurological development is advanced enough to enable grasping abstract information (Chaffee, Ward, & Tipton, 1970a) , and individuals are slowly growing in their role as active participants in democracy (Sears & Levy, 2003) , which makes political information relevant for the first time. However, the results suggest that political knowledge and news use are already correlated at the age of fifteen. That means that the analysis does not cover the antecedents of the spiral. Accordingly, children younger than fifteen must already be able to make enough sense of news to learn from it about political structures. The observed high initial level of political knowledge supports this conclusion. That means that the foundation of the spiral of political knowledge is probably laid much earlier. This finding is line with a recent study of Prior (2010) on the development of political interest over the life course. He found that political interest is already fully developed at the age of 16 and changes little over the life course. To fully uncover the beginning of the spiral it is necessary should start observing the process at a young age in future research. Yet, even though the very beginning of the spiral was measured, it was still investigated at an early stage.

A similar conclusion can be drawn with regard to the effect of covariates in my analysis. According to the data, male, highly educated respondents, with a high social economic status have higher initial levels of political knowledge and news use (with the exception of the higher initial level of news use among women). This finding is in line with extant literature on the knowledge gap (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; Jerit, 2009; Mondak & Anderson, 2004). Yet, these factors had little impact on the growth in political knowledge and news use. However, the analytical model was designed to validly measure news effects and

the effect of background variables were used as covariates only, we should not interpret too much into the lack of effects of background factors on growth in knowledge.

Another interesting finding of this study worth noting is that the upward spiral of political learning is not found when news use is defined as mere exposure to news. Only once exposure is weighted by the amount of attention news users are paying to the news, the spiral occurs. This finding reiterates the results of other studies on knowledge effects of news (Chaffee & Schleuder, 1986) , and is linked to the argument that political learning is a psychological process that is dependent upon motivation and ability of the recipients of political information to retain and process new information (Price & Zaller, 1993). By weighting exposure with attention to news measures the notion of motivated news use was included in the model, as it allows to distinguish between those who are not interested in processing information and those who actively seek out the news.

In this study a complex structural model based on three waves of panel data is presented. Though the data fits the theoretical model well, a number of limitations of this study should be taken into account when interpreting the results: First, the interval of one year in between the measurements, which could be either too long or too short, depending on the point of view. Political learning is a life-long process (Sears & Levy, 2003) , and a time span of two years is therefore relatively short. An interval of one year in between the measurements, on the other hand, can be considered to be rather long. It might very well be that political knowledge and news use develop in a much faster pace. For example, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) demonstrate knowledge gains during a very short time period, so do many studies of knowledge gains during electoral campaigns (W. P. Eveland, Hayes, Shah, & Kwak, 2005). That means that I am neither able to present a complete model of the dynamics of political learning nor a model on a very detailed level. Instead I provide a compromise between long and short term effects – a model of a specific section of the spiral in bird's eye

view. Second, as an adolescent sample forms the bases of this analysis, the generalizability of my results can be questioned. In order to be confident that my results hold for the general population, the analysis would have to be repeated with older and younger respondents. Third, in this study only three waves of data are available to model longitudinal developments. This is the minimal amount of measurements to construct such a model. Additional measurements would increase the robustness of the model as such.

These shortcomings aside, this study contributes to the extant body of literature on news effects on political knowledge by proposing and testing a theoretical model of the dynamics of political learning from the news. It advances our knowledge on the topic in several ways: 1) By using a measure of news use, that combines exposure on all major sources of news in one country, including specific internet news sources, and attention to news, 2) By taking on a longitudinal perspective which allows to test the mutual causal influence of news use and political knowledge simultaneously, 3) By adding the dimension of time to the notion of mutual interdependence of the two factors, which leads to the conceptualization of a reinforcing spiral of political knowledge.

One question remains open. What happens to those who have no part in the upward spiral? Those who never build in enough knowledge to get interested and understand the news? If only those who already know fairly much about politics can learn from the news, how can adolescents with low political knowledge become informed and engaged citizens? It is clear that media can only provide a very small part to the solution for this problem and the importance of political education in school cannot be emphasized enough. But once the foundation is laid, news media are a prime place to enrich and reinforce political knowledge. The possibilities to raise political engagement through media is further explored in Capter 5.

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Chapter 4: Pathway to political participation: The influence of online and offline news media on internal efficacy and turnout of first time voters.

Manuscript under review

Abstract

News media play a key role in informing young citizens about politics and cultivating a sense of political efficacy. Online news media, in particular, are expected to have a positive impact due to their interactivity and new opportunities to share and discuss information. This study analyzes the impact of online and offline news media use on the growth in internal efficacy among adolescents, based on data collected in a three wave panel survey in the Netherlands (N=729). Additionally the impact of internal efficacy on turnout is being tested using a fourth wave of the same sample (N=612). The results show that while newspaper reading has the strongest effects among traditional news sources, actively participating in the communication process of political information online has the strongest impact on internal efficacy. Internal efficacy, in turn, is found to be a significant predictor of first time voters. The chapter concludes with a discussion of media use as a pathway to political participation through internal political efficacy.

To many teenagers and adolescents the political world appears to be a very complicated place. So complicated, in fact, that they have the impression that they are not qualified or competent enough to participate in it. The decrease of internal political efficacy among the youngest generation is often seen as a serious threat for democracy (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007). Social scientists have therefore devoted a considerable amount of work to gain insight into how adolescents can learn about politics (see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation) in order to feel competent enough to turn out and vote (Beaumont, 2010; Delli Carpini, 2000).

In the discussion about potential solutions to the problem, media, in particular new media, play a key role as they can provide relevant information about political actors and processes and foster to the political understanding of their users. After all, citizens of the youngest generation are the first *digital natives* and have ample skills to search, read, react to, and create political messages on the Internet. Moreover, in many European countries access to the Internet for this generation is almost universal. In the Netherlands, for example, 95% 15 to 25 year olds use the Internet on a daily bases (CBS).

There is some empirical evidence that indicates that internet use, internal political efficacy, political participation turnout of adolescents are indeed connected (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). However, most of these studies are based on cross-sectional data or small scale experimental research. This chapter adds to the existing research in two ways. First, by relying on panel survey data collected over the course of two years the level of internal efficacy is not investigated at a fixed point in time. The focus is on *change* in the dependent variable over time and its potential causes. This way, this study answers a recent call for a longitudinal perspective on the phenomenon (Weaver Lariscy, Tinkham, & Sweetser, 2011).

Second, I do not look at the Internet as an isolated source of information. Instead this study includes classic information sources, such as newspapers and TV news as well as new media sources of information to find out which of these sources contribute to the development internal efficacy. By providing an integrated analytical model of a typical political information diet of an adolescent and its effect on internal political efficacy, this chapter also contributes to the academic debate on sources of political efficacy in a theoretical way. Finally, evidence is provided that internal political efficacy has a strong impact on electoral participation in the same sample, arriving at a comprehensive analysis of the pathway from adolescent news media use to political participation.

Digital natives and internal political efficacy

Political efficacy is at the core of beliefs and values needed to participate in a democratic society. It is a personality trait acquired early in life that influences the degree to which citizens participate in politics throughout their lives. Therefore, determinants and mechanisms leading to the development of "the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about the change" (Campbell, Gurin, & Miller, 1971, p. 187) have been in the focus of research in political for the past sixty years in political science and psychology alike (Beaumont, 2010). The concept can be distinguished into two dimensions: *external efficacy,* which is primarily dealing with the "responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands" (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991, p. 1408) and *internal efficacy,* defined as beliefs about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics" (Niemi et al., 1991, p. 1408). Closely related to the latter dimension is *information efficacy,* a concept put forward by Kaid and colleagues (2007) and describes citizens voters confidence in their own political knowledge.

Mass media, in particular newspapers, have been found to play an important role in the development political efficacy among young citizens in the past (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997). By watching news on TV and reading about the political world in daily newspapers adolescents familiarize themselves with political actors and processes and build political knowledge (Delli Carpini, 2000; Shah, McLeod, & Lee, 2009). Over the course of years they become increasingly confident about their skills to participate in politics and reach sufficient levels of political efficacy.

However, political information in the mass media does not reach a large share of the youngest cohort anymore. According to some scholars, declining numbers in newspaper readership among young readers, decreasing interest in TV news (Huang, 2009) and dramatic gaps in political knowledge (Kaid et al., 2007) are all symptoms of the same disease. The youngest generation– in the words of Mindich (2005) – is "tuned out" from the traditional news. Others argue that adolescents have not tuned out but found a new arena of political information: the Internet. This is not simply a shift of information source, political information on the Internet can be a completely different experience due to its social (Bennett, 2008) and interactive (Tedesco, 2007) quality. To the youngest generation, that is familiar with the social character of information on the Internet, a news item is more than an event shown on the media, it something that can be shared, forwarded, commented on or remixed (Coleman, 2008).

In the context of explaining *growth* in internal political efficacy this is an important notion. Previous studies have shown that talking about political events, is a much better predictor on outcome variables of political involvement than mere exposure to the news (Shah et al., 2009). This is due to the way adolescent's process political information. During conversations about abstract political processes with peers, parents or teachers, they make sense of what happened and are introduced to potential interpretations of the events (Mutz,

2002). Of course, events reported in traditional news media can spark political discussions as well, but on the Internet a political debate is more accessible. Articles usually allow readers to comment and engage in a debate with other readers, they can be shared on SNS with minimal effort, and hyperlinks provide the opportunity to find out more about the subject or even participate online, for example by signing an online discussion. Moreover, conversations can be started without the need to be at the same place at the same time. Finally, to the youngest cohort that spends a significant share of the day on social media, sharing and talking online about something they have encountered is a standard way to deal with information (Weaver Lariscy et al., 2011).

However, despite growing empirical support for the causal mechanism connecting use of online political information and internal efficacy (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012; Tedesco, 2007) positive effects on adolescents are still hard to trace on a large scale in the field (Boulianne, 2009; Esser & de Vreese, 2007). If effects of political communication are found, other sources of information like newspapers and TV were omitted from the model and the effects are rather small (e.g. Kenski & Stroud, 2006). This might be a consequence of limited interest in political online participatory media among adolescents (Bakker, 2013) and the countless opportunities to select information that is welcome and even personalize news sources in a way to avoid unwanted (political) news.

Hypotheses and analytical model

In order to study effects of news media on internal political efficacy and participation it is important to take into account all aspects relevant to the process. An integrated model should include measures of usage of traditional sources of political information, TV news and newspapers, as well as online sources of political information.

H1: News use has positive effect on internal efficacy

H1a: Use of TV news has a positive effect on internal efficacy

H1b: Use of newspapers a positive effect on internal efficacy

H1c: Use of online news sources has a positive effect on internal efficacy

Moreover, we need to not merely include a measure of internet usage, but differentiate what it means: simply reading an article or actively engaging in a political discussion by forwarding or commenting on it (civic messaging) (see also Bakker & de Vreese, 2011). In the latter case a much stronger effect is to be expected as the communicative process inspires information processing and taking a stance on political issues thereby empowering young citizens (Tedesco, 2007). According to the communication mediation model by Shah et al. (2005), these effects could even fully mediate effects of online political information sources.

H2: Civic messaging has a positive effect on internal efficacy

Internal efficacy as a driver of political participation

A decrease in electoral political participation among the youngest generation has raised concerns both in the scientific and political world. Though the US have witnessed a recent increase in turnout among the youngest voters, the general trend is towards less and less participation. In Europe the last few elections were characterized by an increasing abstinence of young citizens from the ballots. In the Netherlands the turnout rate among voters younger than 25 has dropped by over 20% in the last three elections (CBS).

According to the research of Kaid and colleagues (2007) this can be deducted to a lack of internal political efficacy, or information efficacy. Especially the youngest generation feels that they lack the competence and knowledge to take an electoral decision. Given that internal efficacy is highly predictive of political participation among adults as well (Clarke & Acock, 1989; Scheufele & Nisbet, 2002), I expect to find that those who feel confident about their political knowledge and understanding are more inclined to turnout at the first elections they are eligible to participate.

H3: Internal efficacy has a positive influence on the likelihood to turn out at the first elections.

Method

In order to investigate the influence of differential media use on internal efficacy, I rely on a three wave panel survey conducted in the Netherlands between 2010 and 2012 among a sample of adolescents aged 15 to 18 at the beginning of the survey[17]. To test the effect of internal efficacy a fourth wave was added directly following the general election taking place in the Netherlands in October 2012.

Sample

The sample was drawn from a population representative database administered by a Dutch opinion poll institute, GfK, using a light quota sample. The quotas used were age (15 to 18), gender, and education. 1653 respondents participated in the first wave (June 16th through July 10th 2011). 1186 of those respondents also participated in the second wave taking place from June 16th through July 10th 2011 (attrition rate: 28%.). The third wave took place from June 14th to July 3rd 2012. 888 respondents participated in the third wave (attrition rate: 25%).

The fourth measurement took place from 14.09.2012 to 24.09.2010. 746 respondents participated in the final wave (attrition rate: 16%). Panel attrition did not lead to a significant change in the composition of the panel with regard to key demographic variables age, gender, and education.

Measures

News use: Three different modes of news use are included in the model explaining internal efficacy: TV news use, newspaper use, and internet news sources. All items concerning news use are measured as exposure to a specific news outlet in days a week (1 to

[17] The data collection was funded in part by the Amsterdam School of Communication Research and in part by the Swiss Science Foundation within the framework of NCCR democracy.

7). To achieve a parsimonious model, measures of use of specific news outlets are combined by calculating the mean per mode of news. For TV news use I combined use scores of the main evening news broadcast in public and commercial TV (M: 3.49, SD: .03). Internet news use is a combined a measure of use of a webpage of a newspaper, webpage of a TV news show, or use of the main online only news source in the NL (nu.nl) (2.54, SD: .03). Newspaper use was assessed by combining exposure scores to national quality newspapers or regional newspapers (M: 2.25, SD: .03).

Civic messaging: The level of civic messaging was assessed using a scale of items measuring participation in any of the following forms of political online communication (M: 0.18, SD.004). Post a political message or video on a social network site (SNS), Chat or (micro)blog about politics, sign an online petition, participate in an online discussion, start an online discussion about politics, organize an online petition, join a political cause on a SNS, forward an email with political content, and email an politician. All items were measured on a three point scales (never, sometimes, often) (Cronbach's Alpha: .80). A factor analysis was carried out to insure that the scale is one-dimensional.

Internal efficacy: Internal efficacy was measured using the standard item: "Sometimes politics seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on". It has been a standard item in the internal efficacy scales used in the American National Election for decades (Niemi et al., 1991) and is also used as a single item indicator in large scale surveys like the European Social Study or the Norwegian election study. The item was measured on a 7 point scale (M: 3.41, SD: .03).

Turnout: Turnout at the first elections is assessed as a binary measure of self-reported behaviour. In order to decrease over-reporting of turnout the questionnaire offered three different categories to report non-participation ("normally I am voting, but this time I could

not make it"; "I thought about voting, but this time I did not do it", and" I have not voted") which were later recoded into one category.

Controls: Age, gender, and formal education were added to the model as control variables. Education is measured by type of school that the respondent is currently attending or has attended in the past (low, middle, or high).

Analysis

To make optimal use of the panel data random effects generalized least square estimation is used, because it is the most efficient form estimation and provides the opportunity to control for relevant background factors. To insure the reliability of the analysis a Hausman test was carried out that yielded no significant differences between fixed and random effects model ($p>.01$). The advantage of this approach is that instead of predicting a *level* of internal efficacy at a given point in time, as a cross sectional or auto-regressive model would, this model predicts *change* in the dependent variable based on change in the independent variables (for example, if adolescents starts reading a daily newspaper, or starts engaging in online discussions more frequently). This means that the causal relationships are tested in a more valid and conservative way.

However, this approach forecloses to test a full model including media use, internal efficacy and turnout, as the latter variable is only measured once. The analysis is therefore split in a panel model predicting change in internal efficacy and a model that predicts turnout on with internal efficacy as the main predictor. Moreover, measures of news use were not included in the final wave of the panel, as the final wave of the survey had to be rather short in length. I therefore test the effect of internal efficacy on turnout using a minimal, parsimonious model. To ensure reliability of the results the model is retested including an inclusive set of known factors of internal efficacy that have been measured during the third wave, three months prior to the elections.

Results

Table 4.1 presents the results of the panel data regression analysis explaining change in internal political efficacy. The first model includes the use of the three kinds of news sources: TV news, online news, and newspapers as well as control variables. When comparing the three modes of news use it becomes apparent that newspaper usage is the strongest and most significant predictor of internal political efficacy. TV news use has no significant impact on the dependent variable, whereas the usage of online news sources is predicted to have a slightly significant effect on internal political efficacy. Hence, H1 is partially confirmed by the analysis. Both online and offline news media contribute to rising levels of internal efficacy, with the exception of TV news.

However, this effect becomes insignificant once civic messaging is added to the model (Model 2), implying that active online political communication mediates the effect of political information obtained online. Looking at the second model it also becomes clear that civic messaging is by far the most important predictor in explaining an increase in internal political efficacy over time. The analysis therefore supports the proposition of H2.

Table 4.1: Random Effects Panel Model Results Predicting Change in Internal Political Efficacy Using GLS Estimation (N = 729 individuals in 3 waves)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Variable	β	SE	B	SE
Intercept	2.63**	.56	1.53**	.58
TV news use	.03	.02	.03	.02
Online news sources use	.06*	.02	.01	.02
Newspaper use	.09**	.02	.05*	.02
Education	.40**	.10	.39**	.10
Gender	-.47**	.10	-.49**	.10
Age	.01	.03	.005	.03
Civic messaging			1.29**	.19
P	.45		.45	
Wald χ^2	69.96**		116.95**	

Note: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

Turning to the effect of internal efficacy on the likelihood to participate in the first elections I find strong support for H3 in my data (Table 2)[18]. As it becomes apparent from Table 4.2 internal efficacies is a key driver of turnout. If young voters feel only a little more efficacious, measured in one item step on a seven point scale, the odds to turn out and vote increases by nearly 50%.

[18] Given the small N, we chose to present a parsimonious including only a few key control variables here. A model based on an inclusive list of control variables (political interest, social economic status, parental education, mobilization through others, and general media use was also estimated and yielded no different results with regard to significance level and size of the effect. These control variables were measured during the third wave three months prior to the elections.

Table 4.2: Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Turnout (n = 612)

Predictor	B	SE B
Internal efficacy	.46**	.10
Age	.07	.15
Education	.58*	.30
Gender	.35	.28
Intercept	-2.0	2.6

Note:. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. $\chi^{2:}$ 31.08**

Discussion

In this chapter I analyzed how news use and civic messaging can contribute to the growth of internal efficacy in a period that is crucial for the development of political skills, namely the two years leading up to the first general election. The effects of the different news sources are not tested in a vacuum, but in an integrated model of political communication relevant to the age group. This allows comparing the influence of the different sources and reliably attributing effects to the correct source.

The results show that for young citizens acquiring confidence in their competence to participate in the political system by using political information is a complex process. Whether or not news use contributes to internal political efficacy depends a) on the type of medium in which political information is presented and b) on the level of involvement. According to the data newspaper reading is still the most effective information source with regard to the development of internal political efficacy. These results are in line with research dating back as far as the 1970ties as well as recent studies on the effect of news use on political knowledge and engagement (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Esser & de Vreese, 2007). Given the downturn in newspaper readership in the past decades, especially among the

youngest generation, these findings raise concerns. If TV and internet news sources cannot replace the informational value of newspapers, how will future generations acquire the confidence in their competence to participate in the political process?

The analysis presented in this chapter provides a partial answer to this question. According to the results *digital natives* are indeed best informed through the Internet. However, this is under the condition that they assume an active role in the communication process. Similar to the findings of Chapter 3, I find again that mere exposure does not lead to political learning. Information needs to be processed in order to be effective. If adolescents are part of message construction, be it by engaging in an online discussion or merely by forwarding a political message to their peers, their level of internal political efficacy rises significantly. The effect is stronger than the effects of usage of any of the more passive form of news, including newspapers. These results fit well into the communication mediation model proposed by McLeod and his colleagues (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2010). By communicating about political messages interpersonally, online or offline, adolescents process information and become more engaged.

Yet, as promising as these findings are, the data also shows a key problem, which is that civic messaging is not widely spread. Less than 15% of the sample has ever engaged in civic messaging. Compared to the wide reach of TV news (over 80% report to watch TV news at least once a week), this is a rather small share. Given that watching TV news has no significant impact on an increase in internal efficacy, I can conclude that a large share of young adults today does not use news media in a way that fosters internal political efficacy. This might explain the declining levels of turnout among young voters in Netherlands and elsewhere in recent years (CBS). On the other hand, these results also indicate that European adolescents are not as "tuned out" as their American counterparts (Mindich, 2005). Even

though it had no impact on change in internal efficacy, at least over 80% report to follow the news on TV on a regular bases.

Turning to the effect of internal efficacy on turnout my results echo recent finding from the United States (Glasford, 2008): Internal efficacy is a key driver of turnout in elections at a young age. As political involvement in the first elections has a strong socializing effect (Sears & Valentino, 1997) and predetermines political engagement throughout the life course, it becomes apparent why understanding the pathway to political participation is so important. If young citizens are socialized in a way that leaves them feeling competent enough to take an electoral decision when it is their first time to vote, they are likely to become engaged citizens throughout their life.

This implies that measures aimed at increasing the low turnout rates among young voters, could be effective, if they are intended to foster young citizen's confidence in their understanding of politics. This could be achieved through political education in schools, but also through media education. However, it would not be enough to simply prescribe the young to use the news. In this study it has become apparent that the degree to which the user is involved in the message is of crucial relevance. Furthermore, research has shown that the topic and other characteristics of the news also have an impact on potential effects. Strategically framed news, for example, is likely to raise political cynicism among the young and can ultimately lead to a refusal of major policy decisions taken by the government (Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2008). News media content of high relevance to the young like coverage of developments in education policy, on the other hand, is likely to increase internal political efficacy because mediated information is processed more efficiently if it relates to the everyday life of an individual (Fisch, 2009; see also chapter 5).

The models presented in this chapter are based on panel data collected over the course of over two years. This has advantages as well as disadvantages. One of the main

disadvantages of collecting panel data among such a young age group is that the panel attrition is relatively high. Over the course of two years we have lost more than half of the respondents. And even though that has not lead to significantly different demographic composition of the panel, there is no certainty that there is no significant systematic attrition with regard to my dependent and independent variables. On the other hand, panel data provide the unique opportunity to study change in a dependent variable rather than a status at a specific point in time. Hence, if a relationship is found we can be confident that it is not a spurious correlation caused by a third unobserved variable. If I had analyzed just a singular wave of my study, there would have been strong significant relationships of all of news use variables and internal political efficacy.

A two year time frame during late adolescents (age 16 to 18) provides an interesting insight into political socialization processes during formative years. However, we know that the process of political socialization starts at a much younger age and continues throughout the life course (Sears & Levy, 2003). In order to get a full picture of the processes and mechanisms future research should extend the longitudinal scope even more.

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Chapter 5: Casting a Political Idol? A TV Casting Show for a Political Party and Its Effects on Adolescents

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Manuscript under review

Abstract

This chapter presents the results of a study of the effects of targeted political information aimed to increase political involvement of adolescents. In the discussion concerning the lack of political engagement of adolescents the media are usually regarded as part of the problem rather than a potential solution. Based on OLS regression analysis preformed on data collected among a representative sample of 15-18 year olds in the Netherlands (N=1653) this study shows that exposure to targeted media content can increase adolescents political engagement significantly, especially among those who show low political interest. To achieve this effect the program deals with topics relevant for the target group, young protagonists, and offers various opportunities to become politically active on- and offline. The results are discussed in the light of recent developments in the field of media malaise theory and the media's potential to engage the youth in politics.

Adolescents' general lack of political interest and engagement of adolescents has been a point of concern in the scientific world and beyond (Putnam 2000; Delli Carpini 2000). Compared to older cohorts teenagers are less likely to engage in political initiatives, in particular traditional conventional politics (voting, party membership, volunteering in political campaigns, Norris, 2003); and show little interest in current events (Mindich, 2005; Patterson, 2007), even if the information is presented in the new media (Subrahmanyam et al., 2001).

Although most of the empirical evidence in the field originates from the USA, European studies indicate that the phenomenon might be universal to the Western established democracies. In Germany, adolescents are less likely to engage in political parties (Niedermayer, 2006) or even to develop a preference for one (Mößner, 2006). Henn and Weinstein (2006) observe a comparable alienation of adolescents from politics in the UK. In the Netherlands Spangenberg and Lampert (2009) concluded that adolescents have turned their back on societal responsibilities and called them "unlimited" generation, after comparing repeated cross-sectional data of a representative sample of the population.

The consequences for democracy of this development are severe, as political attitudes developed in preadolescence and adolescence are likely to persist over the life course (Prior, 2010; Sears & Levy, 2003). In a worst case scenario, this means that the generation which is growing up in the first decennium of the 21st century will remain distant to the political realm, implying that a large share will exclude themselves from processes of political decision making during their entire life.

However, there is also evidence to the opposite: In the past two elections in the USA, the participation of young voters increased for the first time in almost twenty years (CIRCLE) and adolescents are more likely to engage in voluntary community service than their parent generation at their age (Sears & Levy, 2003). Nevertheless, the majority of the empirical

evidence concerning the political engagement and integration of adolescents points to the conclusion that the youth of today is "tuned out" (Mindich, 2005). Although the distance of adolescents from politics and the potential consequences have been studied elaborately, there are very few studies that propose solutions to the problem. This study fills this gap by investigating in how far targeted political information in form of a TV program meant for a young audience can overcome the exclusion and alienation of adolescents from the political world. In this regard this chapter is different to the two previous chapters of this dissertation. Whereas these chapters were dedicated to analyze patterns and dynamics of media effects in a standard situation, this study takes the form of an intervention study in which the effects of an intended deviation from the "normal" media use situation is investigated.

The media as cause of the political alienation of adolescents

In the discussion concerning adolescent's lack of political interest and motivation to participate, the media are usually not considered to be part of the solution. On the contrary, the mass media are often even blamed to be partially responsible for the political alienation of the young.

In the academic debate this claim is substantiated using three lines of reasoning that linking exposure to media content and lack of political engagement. The first is a *time budget argument* (Putnam, 2000): Teenagers spend more time using media than any other cohort on an average day, 8 hours on an average day (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). In fact, they spend more time using media than in school (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001). Moreover, they are more likely to do so for entertainment or recreational purposes (Shah, Kwak, & Holbert, 2001). That means that the amount of time that could be spent on political information, let alone civic or political engagement is cut short. Hence, according to this argument, exposure to media does not actively change adolescent's attitudes towards politics,

but takes up time that could have been invested in activities that stimulate political engagement otherwise. However, this line of reasoning has been contested. In a survey of 1501 14 to 22 year olds Pasek et al. (2006) observe that this argument holds only for heavy users of media content. Occasional media use, even if it is completely unrelated to politics, facilitates political engagement of a young audience in this study.

The second argument concerns the effect of a general negative style of reporting in the coverage of politics. In line with *media malaise theory* (for an overview see Holtz-Bacha, 1990), the key notion of this argument is that politics are often presented in a negative light, as coverage on politics tends to focus on conflict and scandals and the Machiavellian game of power rather than issue-oriented policy debates. Being confronted with the failures instead of the virtues of politics the audience becomes more and more cynical towards politics and ultimately refrains from engagement in the political world (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Yet there is empirical evidence that the theory does not hold for adolescents to full extent. Elenbaas and de Vreese (2008) studied the effects of exposure to strategy framed media content among adolescents and observed a significant effect on the level of cynicism. The more strategy-framed news adolescents encounter, the more cynical they become towards the political system. However, higher levels of cynicism did not translate into lack of political engagement. On the contrary, it has been repeatedly shown that news use affects adolescents' political interest and engagement positively (Esser & de Vreese, 2007; Holtz-Bacha, 1990).

The third and last line of reasoning, the *exclusion argument*, is specific to the situation of adolescents in the political system and therefore particularly valid. According to this theory the alienation of adolescents from politics is a result of their exclusion from the political world. This idea was first put forward by Katz (1993) in an article in the Rolling Stone magazine. Buckingham (1998) revisited the idea and developed it further. He specified two dimensions of exclusion from politics of the youth: the system and the communication

dimension. The system dimension concerns minors' exclusion from institutional political power in democratic systems. Adolescents, who have not reached voting age, are omitted from all formal decision making processes, e.g. voting and petitions. They are, therefore, an unattractive target group for decision makers as policy concessions to minors cannot directly translate into electoral support. This has two consequences: a) policy issues that are first and foremost relevant to adolescents are often not on the agenda and b) political decisions are frequently not taken in favor of this particular age group.

The second dimension regards the communication of politics. Again, the exclusion of minors from the public debate is twofold: First, young voices are excluded in the news as *protagonists*, in the form of interviews or talk shows; and second, the *language* of political debates frequently incomprehensible to a young audience. That means that the presentation of news and current affairs in the media does not match the style and taste of adolescents. In other words, the youth of today is 'tuned out' because the media do not offer political information on their wave-length.

In this chapter I investigate whether a change in the communication of politics is able to *include* minors. If adolescents are featured in a political information outlet as important and relevant political actors and the focus is on topics relevant to the age group, can this affect the integration of minors in the political system? If the exclusion of minors from news and the public debate about politics in terms of protagonists, language and style is in fact part of the reason for their alienation from the political world as Buckingham (1997) argues, will an explicit inclusion in a political TV show affect the political engagement of adolescents positively?

Inclusive TV programming for adolescents

The ideal of an inclusive political TV show according to Buckingam's standards would

appeal to a young audience in more ways than merely including them in the political debate and process. A program that matches young taste with regard to protagonists, topics and style triggers several mechanisms of media effects that are known in the literature.

Young and attractive protagonists enable positive identification with the characters on television for the audience. This, on the other hand, stimulates model learning according to Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (2009). According to this theory observed behavior in the media trigger learning mechanisms on concrete as well as abstract levels. Identification with the model is a positive moderator in this process. The more an individual feels connected to a model in the media, the more likely an imitation of the observed behavior becomes. Therefore we can expect that TV programs that feature young protagonists that engage in politics stimulate those viewers that identify with them to become active themselves.

The second feature of an inclusive TV program is content that is both interesting and relevant for a young audience. By focusing on issues close to the reality of adolescents information about politics becomes more approachable and understandable. According to theories that explain processing mechanisms of information processing (Fisch, 2009), adolescents are more likely to understand and learn from information transmitted through mass media if it relates to issues that are familiar to them. The reason is that information is usually processed through already established cognitive links. The more links to new information individuals have, the better they are able to process it. That means that political TV programs that deal with topics and problems adolescents know and care about are much more likely to be remembered and processed.

Finally, the “young” style and language of an ideal inclusive TV program can contribute to enhanced memory of the content and potential changes in the behavior of the audience. This can be explained by relying on theoretical work in the field of advertisement

research (Gleich, 2000). Style elements such as music, staging and editing influence the mood of the audience, which increases – in turn – the likelihood that the presented information is memorized and positively evaluated.

These three features, young protagonists, topics relevant and interesting for a young audience, and young style and editing were key elements of the targeted political information program Lijst 0, which is investigated in this chapter.

Targeted political information program: Lijst 0

The targeted political information program investigated in this chapter is called "Lijst 0" was a series of eight episodes of a political TV program broadcasted prior to the Dutch parliamentary elections in 2010. The series featured the foundation of a political party for young people. In the first episodes the front runner of the party was determined in an *American Idol* like competition and the audience was invited to vote for their favorite candidate using telephone text messaging (SMS). After the audience had decided on a frontrunner, the producers of the program supported the candidate in founding a political party. In the subsequent episodes the audience followed the steps of the party which was formally running in the general elections in the same year. For example, one of the first tasks of the newly elected frontrunner, Lot Feijens, was to find a name for the new party. Feijens called the party Lijst 17, which referred to the name of the TV program (Lijst 0) as well as their position on the ballot. The next episodes covered other pivotal elements of the election campaign of the party: the founding assembly, the formal registration, the first press conference, the discussion and decision on the party manifesto, the election campaign and finally Election Day. Besides the coverage of the upcoming party called "Lijst 17", the most popular established parties were also part of the program, mostly in form of a quiz in which the front runner had to answer youth related questions to determine his or her "real age".

Moreover, the producers of the program also organized a televised public debate a few days prior to the election in a popular club in Amsterdam in which the frontrunners of the most popular established parties and of "Lijst 17" answered the questions of a young audience.

The program had an average audience share of 8,5% of young adults (20 – 34), which is a little below average for political information programs in the Netherlands (van Baars & Zandbergen, 2010). In the general elections the party founded in the program received 7456 votes, one eighth of what is needed to win a seat in the parliament.

Despite its mediocre success in terms of audience and election results the program is a good example of a program that overcomes exclusion of the youth in the communication of politics not only because it features young topics and protagonists. The concept of the program went beyond mere broadcasting of information, and tried to mobilize its audience to engage in politics both off- and online. To give a few examples: Over the course of the TV series the party Lijst 17 organized several demonstrations and rallies, which were advertised via *Facebook*, a Dutch social networking site called *Hyves* and on *Twitter*. The public debate with the frontrunners was publically accessible as were the constitutional meeting of the party and the audience was invited to come. The most significant feature of interactivity was that the audience could vote for the protagonists of the show in the actual elections. Additionally, there were ample opportunities to discuss the candidates and issues of the show online, either directly with the candidates through their twitter account and social network sites, or on a more general level via the homepage and twitter account of the TV program.

Hypotheses

Based on the three different theories linking adolescents media exposure to political involvement mentioned above, I expect to find effects of exposure to the targeted political information program on two levels a) political cynicism, b) political engagement.

Political cynicism

The reception of the TV program in the Dutch media was mixed. Although the effort to actively engage adolescents in politics was generally appreciated, there were also concerns whether the "young" and somewhat silly style of the program degraded politics and portrayed protagonists who were anything but role model politicians. In the words of media critic Hans Beerekamp (translated by the author):

> *After the jury has sent the only candidate that presented a story with content home, because she was "too serious" (and on top of that she had brought her father to the show and wore the wrong clothes), the remaining candidates are rather vague: two girls that took of part of their clothes because all young people are "standing in their shirt", one depressive dopehaed and a few candidates with experience in the student union ….*[19]

These concerns are in line with a broader discussion in the literature, namely in the media malaise debate. According to Putnam (2000), Cappella & Jamieson (1997) and other advocates of this theory, the scandal and focus orientation of the media present leads to a portrayal of the political world that leaves the audience to believe that politicians care primarily about themselves and their position rather than the public good. Therefore the media are directly responsible for rising levels of political cynicism. This especially holds for media content that is cynical or satirical about politics (Guggenheim, Kwak, & Campbell, 2011).

The targeted political information program studied in this chapter should be no exception to this rule. The front runner of Lijst 17 was chosen by telephone vote, after presenting her political standpoint in underwear. Her competitors sang or danced during the audition. All of this might have fueled the perception, that it does not need a strong character or knowledge to

[19] Published in NRC Handelsblad, 26.4.2010: Zapikliklees: Niet alle jongeren staan in hun hemd.

become a politician. The emphasis on presentation rather than content of politics continued during the whole show. Therefore I expect to find that exposure to the targeted political information program lead to an increase in political cynicism.

H1: Exposure to the targeted political information program leads to higher levels of political cynicism.

Political engagement

Whereas exposure to targeted political information is expected to have negative influence in terms of political cynicism, I expect to find a positive impact on political engagement. Research in the field has shown that this is not necessarily contradictory (De Vreese & Semetko 2002). The hypothesis can be substantiated with Buckingham's (1997) idea of exclusion as cause for political alienation. As pointed out earlier, the targeted political information program was in style, language and approach youth-oriented and therefore able to bypass the exclusion problems of traditional political information programs. These programs fail to include topics that are relevant for a young audience as well as to present information in a language that is interesting and understandable for adolescents (Katz, 1993). Where traditional political information programs exclude, the targeted political information program tried to include the youth in various ways to inform them about their possibilities to be part of the political process. Therefore, I expect to find mobilizing effects of the targeted political information on its audience, not only in terms of turnout. The program also presented a wide range of possibilities to engage in democracy in alternative ways: to discuss politics online, engage in demonstrations or actively contribute to a political party. As the largest part of the sample has not reached voting age yet, the focus of this chapter is on alternative ways of democratic participation.

H2: Exposure to the targeted political information program leads to higher levels of political engagement.

Besides testing the predictions of the media malaise and exclusion argument, I am also interested in the causal ordering of relations between media use and in particular to the targeted political information program and political engagement[20]. Specifically, traditional news use and the exposure to the targeted political information program are being related to each other. Two scenarios are possible. Either the influence of both sources is completely unrelated to each other, or, probably more likely, exposure to the targeted political information program mediates the effects of exposure to traditional news use. That would mean that news exposure affects the likelihood of exposure to the targeted political information program, which in turn affects political engagement. In other words, it could be that only those who already follow the news take an interest in the program, which causes a potential change in political engagement (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Full mediation would imply that there would be no relationship between news use and political engagement when exposure to the targeted political information program is controlled. More likely in this particular case is a partial mediation, implying that there are *direct* effects of news use on political engagement as well as there are *indirect* effects through exposure to the targeted political information program.

RQ1: How does general news use relate to exposure to the targeted political information program?

A second specification of the model is relevant in the context of this analysis. Coleman (2008) expressed concerns that media interventions aimed to include adolescents in the public political debate would only reach those who are already information-rich and from a well-off

[20] It should be noted that the direction of causality in this case is likely to be two directional (see Capter 3). Yet, this cannot be considered in the model due to data constraints. I therefore make no claims regarding the direction of causality, but about the causal path through mediation.

background, this concern is comparable to the theory of the knowledge gap as explained in Chapter 3. That would mean that targeted political information programs, even if succeeding, only reach those who need it the least and would contribute to an information gap between the well and the bad educated. To empirically investigate this concern several interaction effects of socio-demographic as well as attitudinal variables are being tested. I expect to find that the information-rich are more likely to benefit from exposure to the targeted political information program.

H3: The relationship between exposure to the targeted political information program and political engagement is moderated by education, social class, and political interest.

Control variables

Besides the socio-economic background of the respondent, there are two important control variables which will be included in the analytical models. The first is the educational background of the parents. This variable is included to account for potential effects of the discussion culture at home (Percheron & Jennings, 1981). The second included control variable is *political interest*. Arguably, political interest could also be treated as a dependent or at least a mediating variable in this context. The reason why I include it as an independent variable is to account for self-selection effects of media use. In many cases, the causal relationship between any form media use and political attitudes or behavior is double-sided and takes the form of a spiral of influence (Slater, 2007). In this case this means that those who are politically interested tend to use media outlets covering political information which in return increases their political interest. To fully uncover the causal relationship between political interest and political information use longitudinal panel data is needed, which is not available in this case. Therefore political interest is statistically controlled to achieve a conservative test of the hypotheses.

Method

To test the influence of the targeted political information program on political cynicism and political engagement, I rely on a post-test-only quasi-experimental research design. The data was collected through CAWI interviews of a representative[21] sample of the Dutch population age 15 to 18. The questionnaire contained about 60 questions concerning political engagement, media use, and background variables. Respondents took on average 30 minutes to complete. The field period of the research lasted from 16.06.2010 to 11.07.2010, and took place directly after the elections of 2010 and the last episode of the targeted political information program. In total 1653 respondents participated in the survey, the response rate was 70%.

Operationalization

Dependent and independent variables are measured using established scales as far as possible, although some had to be adapted to the situation of an adolescent population. Political cynicism was measured using a shortened version of the Cappella & Jamieson (1997) measures ("Politicians deliberately promise more than they can deliver.", "Politicians primarily look out for their own interests." "You are more likely to win a seat in Parliament through the influence of your political friends than based on your capabilities", "Government officials do not care what people like you think", Cronbach's Alpha: .95, M: 3.50, SE: .02). All items were measured on a 7 point scale. Contrary to the second chapter of this dissertation in which I studied media effects on political trust, I investigate effects on cynicism. Although these concepts should not simply be considered to be two ends of an uni-dimensional continuum they are certainly related to one another.

[21] The sample was provided by a professional opinion research institute (GfK). They administer an existing representative sample of the Dutch population from which the respondents in this survey were drawn.

Political engagement was measured as a cumulative scale of engagement in various political activities (Cronbach's Alpha: .85, M: .17, SE: .005) *: a) offline*: Boycott or buycott a product for political reasons, participate in student or other elections, demonstrate, write or political messages on walls, collect signatures, participate in a campaign rally or engage in an election campaign, donate money or collect donations, wear a t-shirt with a political message *b) online:* Post a political message or video on a social networking site, chat or twitter about a political subject, sign an online petition, participate in a political discussion online, use an electronic election advisor, organize an online discussion or petition, join a cause on facebook, forward a video or link with a political message, blog about politics, send an e-mail to a politician. Each item was measured on a 3 point scale (never, sometimes, and frequently).

General interest in news was measured using a weighted measure of exposure to a number of Dutch news outlets in a typical week (0-7)[22] (Cronbach's Alpha: .79, M: 3.50, SE: .09). The raw scores were weighted by an attention measure ("When you are using one of the news outlet, do you use them with a lot of attention or rather in passing"). Weighting the attention measure served two purposes: a) it accounts for demands to include attention measures in measurements of media exposure and b) the attention measure turned out to be higher for news outlets that provide in depth information, which means that they have stronger influence on the absolute measure, which increases the validity of the general measure. *Exposure to the targeted political information program* was measured by a dichotomous variable. Respondents who had seen the program at least once received a value of 1, all other respondents received a value of 0.

[22] The individual exposure measures where weighted to account for difference in publication intervals.

To analyze the data I used Ordinary Least Squares regression analysis. Besides the variables mentioned above I included educational background[23], the political education program in their schools[24], the formal education of their mother[25], age, gender, social class[26], and political interest[27] as control variables.

Results

Of all 1653 respondents 280 (17%) had seen the targeted political information program at least once. The audience in the sample was generally satisfied with the program. 64% of the 280 respondents liked it, and only 15 % of the audience thought it was boring. 25% claimed that they had thought about electing the party founded in the program. Yet, only 40% agreed to the statement that they had learned something about election campaigns, and 13% could imagine participating in future editions of the program. With regard to the discussion concerning whether or not the program has contributed to political cynicism it is interesting to note that 44% of the audience agreed to the statement that ”the candidates of the show are not ready to be politicians”.

[23] Measured by an ordinal scale indicating the highest level of education they are currently enrolled in.

[24] Measured by an cumulative scale of four items (Cronbach’s Alpha: 0.75, M: 3.37, SE: .03): Teachers encourage us to discuss about political or social problems in school, students feel free to disagree with teachers when debating political or social issues, the school organizes political debates, test elections or political role games, the school organizes excursions to political institutions. All items were measured on a 7 point scale from 1 to 7.

[25] Measured by an ordinal scale measuring the highest level of education completed. We chose to only include the formal education of the mother in the model to avoid distortions of heterogenous living situations in patch-work families.

[26] Measured by asking for the social class of the respondent directly. It would have been preferable to ask for household income rather than the social class to avoid asocial desirability bias, but previous studies in the field have shown that minors frequently do not know their household income.

[27] Measured on a 7 point scale (Question wording: “Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?”)

However, OLS regression analysis revealed that exposure to the targeted political information program did not significantly influence political cynicism, as Hypothesis 1 expected.

Table 5.1: Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Political Cynicism (N = 1653)

	Political Cynicism		
Variable	B	SE B	B
Age	- 0.01	0.025	-.01
Gender	- 0.17	0.055	-.07**
Social Class	0.17	0.036	.12**
Political Education	- 0.03	0.022	-.03
Education	-0.001	0.002	-.01
Parental Education	-0.08	0.032	-.06*
Political Interest	-0.04	0.018	-.079*
Targeted political information exp.	-0.05	0.076	-.01
Hard news exp.	-0.007	0.008	-.02
Intercept	4.12**	.46	
Adjusted R^2	.04		
F	8.76**		

Note: $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$.

With regard to the influence of the targeted political information program on political engagement, the results do support my expectations. Table 5.2 presents the results of the regression analysis predicting political engagement.

Table 5.2: Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Political Engagement (N = 1594)

	Model 1			Model 2		
Variable	B	SE B	B	B	SE B	β
Age	0.01	0.004	.08**	0.02	0.004	.08**
Gender	0.01	0.008	.03	0.01	0.008	.03
Social Class	-0.01	0.005	-.02	-0.04	0.006	-.02
Political Education	0.03	0.003	.18**	0.03	0.0003	.18**
Education	0.00	0.005	.03	0.00	0.005	.03
Parental Education	0.003	0.005	.02	0.00	0.003	.02
Political Interest	0.02	0.003	.19**	0.02	0.003	.19**
Targeted political information exp.	0.03	0.012	.05**	0.03	0.027	.05**
Hard news exp.	0.01	0.001	.28**	0.01	0.001	.28**
Pol. interest * Targeted political information exp.				-.013	0.007	-.10*
Intercept	-0.30**	.074				
Adjusted R^2	.266			.268		
F	2.87			8.94**		

Note: $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$., significance of the moderator is tested one sided

The model has a good fit, as it is able to explain 26% of the variance of the dependent variable. The table shows that exposure to the targeted political information program has a highly significant influence on political engagement. This means that the data supports Hypothesis 2 that watching the targeted political information program is positively related to political involvement of adolescents. Additional analysis revealed that those who had watched the targeted political information are predicted to involve in 0.8 political activities more compared to those who had not. Of the 26 kind of political activities I included in the measure of political engagement online activities show the highest correlation to exposure to

the targeted political information program: using an electronic election aid (*r:* .21), sign an online petition (*r:* .14), chat about politics (*r:* .14), join a cause on facebook (*r:* .12).

Two additional questions were posed concerning the causal mechanism that is at play: the first concerned potential mediation of effects of general news and the second interaction effects of socio-demographic factors and attitudinal variables.

Figure 5.1. Mediation effect

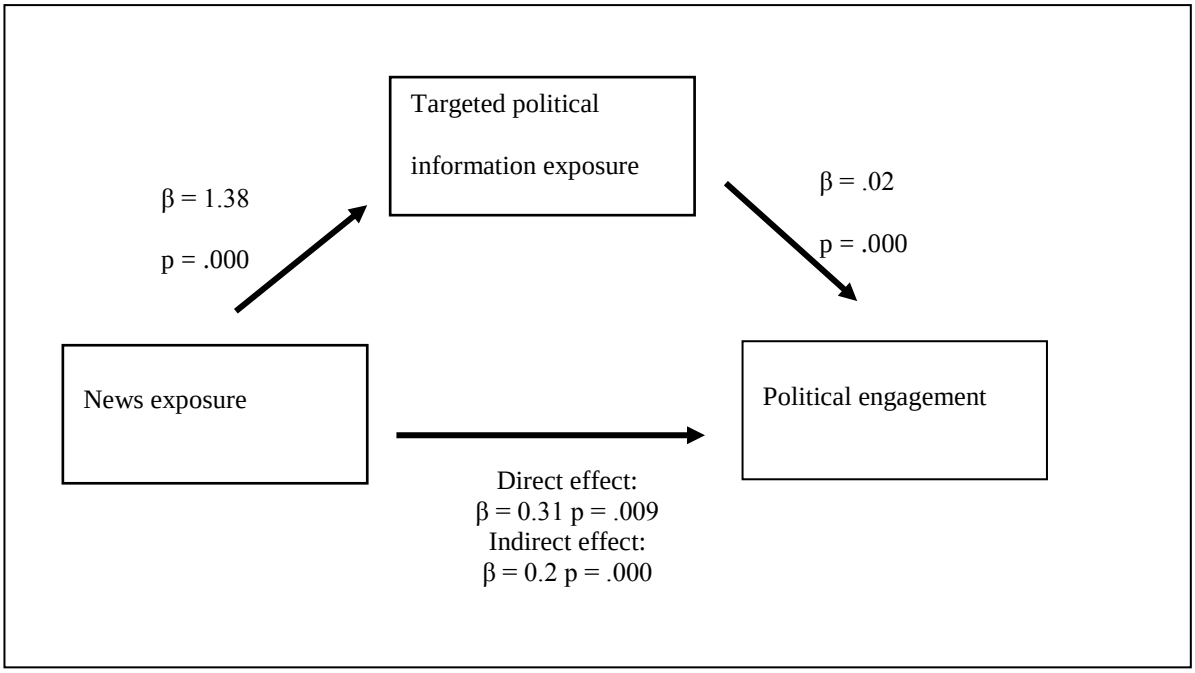
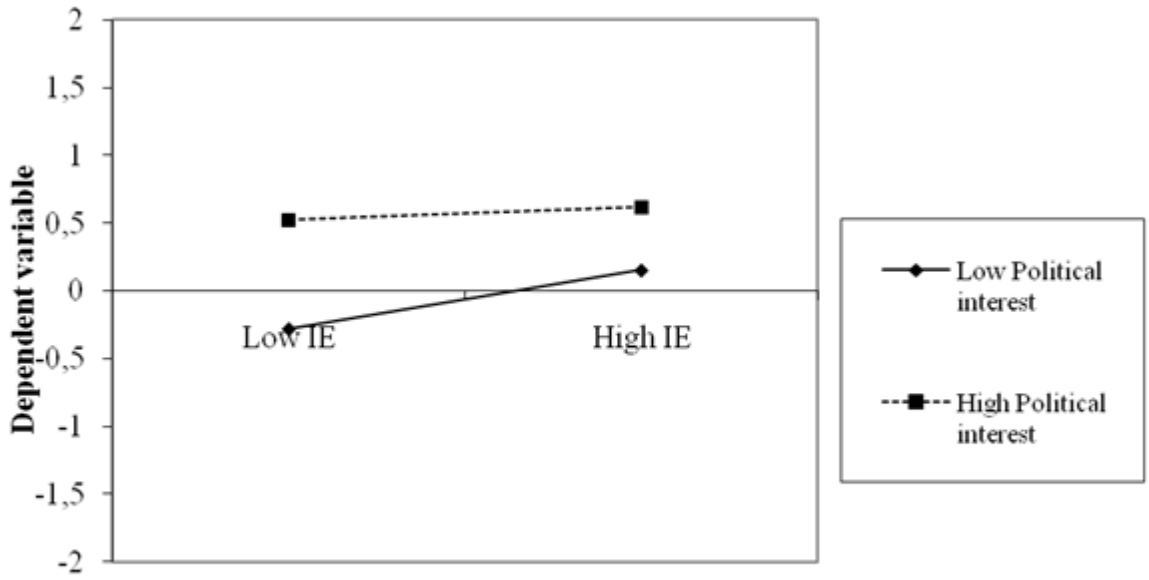


Figure 5.1 presents the results of the mediation analysis that was carried out using the SPSS macros of Preacher and Hayes (2004). The total effect of hard news use on the dependent variable is beta: 0.51, which consist of the direct effect (beta: 0.31) and the indirect effect through exposure to exposure to the targeted political information program (beta: 0.2). The statistical significance of the latter effect was estimated using bootstrapping (2000 resamples). As there is still a significant direct effect, there is no evidence of a full mediation. The findings do imply, however, a partial mediation.

With regard to the expected interaction effects (H3) the results are mixed. There is no empirical evidence for interaction effects of social class, education, or parental education and exposure to the targeted political information program. I did, however, find a significant interaction effect for political interest and exposure to the targeted political information program, however not in the expected direction. According to the analysis presented in table 2, those adolescents who show little political interest benefit the most from the program in terms of political engagement (see also Figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2: Interaction effect



Discussion

In this chapter I investigated how and to what degree a media targeted political information program can influence the political involvement of adolescents. This is particularly relevant, as the involvement of adolescents in traditional expressions of citizenship is decreasing in the United States as well as in Europe. The role of the media in this process is usually not regarded as a very positive one, because using media takes up time that could be spend on political activities otherwise (Shah et al., 2001), the media present politics as a strategic power play rather than as policy debates that are crucial to modern societies (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997), and they exclude young citizens in various ways (Buckingham, 1997; Katz, 1993).

The analysis presented in this chapter shows that a TV program that uses a young content, style and protagonists can influence the political involvement in a positive way without increasing their political cynicism. The latter was a concern since the program showed several features of a political information program that has been related to political cynicism in previous research (Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2008; Putnam, 2000): it focused on the competition rather than on the content of politics, it was highly personalized and the political staff was not presented as very competent. Still, according to the analysis, there was no significant effect of exposure to *List 0* on political cynicism. However, it should be noted that the results should be interpreted with caution as there is still room to improve the specification of the model.

The second model explaining political engagement has a much better model fit and shows that the targeted political information program has indeed fulfilled a mobilizing function. Those adolescents who had watched the program showed a higher level of political engagement, in particular online engagement. This means that the exclusion of minors from

the political debate can be overcome by adjusting the political debate and offering targeted specific media content, at least in part. Moreover, the effect of the program was the strongest for those who are normally show only little interest in politics. This means that the program did not only reach the information-rich as Coleman (2008) feared, but inspired exactly those who are usually not at the forefront of political engagement. This finding is particularly interesting in the light of the knowledge gap debate. According to many studies in the field (for an overview see Eveland & Scheufele 2000), traditional news are most effective in terms of political mobilization and learning, for those viewers who already care the most about politics, high educated, wealthy media users. This implies that news media contribute to a knowledge and participation gap between the information-rich and information-poor, and also a skewed representation of the population in politics. These findings mean that adjusting political information to be more inclusive of young topics and protagonist can help to bridge the gap when it is still in phase of emergence.

Yet, the effectiveness of the targeted political information program did not mean that traditional sources of political information became irrelevant for political mobilization. On the contrary, traditional news outlets had a strong and positive impact on political engagement implying that watching the news on television or reading the newspaper inspired the youth to actively engage too. It also inspired the respondents in the sample to watch the targeted political information program which lead in turn to an even higher degree of mobilization. Therefore, I do not claim that traditional news outlets should change and become more youth-oriented to include young audiences. Instead, I recommend adding complementary "young" political information outlets to the existing news landscape. The findings of this study suggest that it is the variety of media offers that inspires and mobilizes the youth.

However, when interpreting the results it is important to note that there are significant data constraints that imply that we need to be cautious in reading too much into the results. The most important constraint is that this chapter presents the results of a study of media effects of one specific program using cross-sectional data. In order to be sure that the causality runs in the expected direction and is correctly attributed to use of this program it would have been beneficial to apply a 2x2 experimental design instead of a post-test only experimental design. The results would arguably be more convincing if I could prove through pre-test data that users of the targeted information program have indeed engaged more in politics compared to non-users. This way, the possibility of self-selection would have been eliminated. According to the results with regard to the development of political knowledge, self-selection is a very likely scenario, implying that those who were more likely to engage in the first place are also the ones using the program. However, controlling for political interest did solve this problem in part.

Second, as this study of media effects is not conducted in a laboratory environment, we cannot be sure that political engagement is in fact a consequence of use of this one specific TV program. Other events that have taken place in this time frame might have caused adolescents to become engaged in politics. However, this would not explain a significantly different level of engagement between users of the program and non-users of the program as these events could have affected both groups.

Still, despite its positive effects, targeted political information programs like *Lijst 0* are not the universal solution to all problems connected to the failure of political socialization of adolescents in the past decades. First of all because, even though the program had reached 17% of the sample, there are 83% left who did not tune in and therefore could not benefit from the positive effects of the program. They remain excluded, and it is unlikely that more and other media interventions will reach them. Secondly, a program like Lijst 17 is not

suitable to inform and explain all kinds of political issues. It worked in the very particular context of a national general election campaign, which is a period in which political issues are both relevant and exciting due to the competition of the parties. When it comes to the everyday life of politics and the task of the media is primarily to inform about complex policy issues like alternatives in measures to the integration of foreigners or the budget, a different approach is needed to reach the youth. A 19 year old protagonist without a political background who hardly understands the problems herself might not be as suitable to present the issues in this context. Finally, the rather small size of the effect should be noted. Although participation in one additional political activity is a considerable improvement, it is not enough to consolidate an attitude of active citizenship. This is where other agents of political socialization (Sears and Levy, 2003) come in, in particular political education at school. In my analysis this factor proved to be the single most important agent in stimulating political engagement, far more important that the level of formal education of the respondents and their parents.

To summarize the results of this chapter and answer the research question, whether a media targeted political information program can overcome the political alienation of the youth from politics: The answer is yes it can. But only as part of a general political education of adolescents to which parents, and more importantly the schools need to contribute to as well. In a scenario in which minors are sensitized for their role in democracy by schools and parents, a TV program that shows them how they can make their voice heard in a democratic political system and provides them with various opportunities to do so, can thrive even more than the example presented in this chapter.

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Chapter 6: General conclusion

In times of dwindling turnout rates among young voters and a growing gap between traditional politics and the young, understanding the process of political socialization is possibly more important than ever. Yet, the youth's alienation from politics leaves us puzzled. We neither fully comprehend what keeps adolescents from politics, nor do we have a convincing plan in place to overcome the distance between politics and the young. Especially the role of the media needs to be investigated thoroughly, as it has been neglected by science despite its prominence in the everyday lives of adolescents. In this dissertation I shed a light on the question if and how media can influence the process of political socialization by investigating three aspects of the process: the development of political attitudes, political knowledge, and political engagement. I provide evidence that media can contribute to growth in political knowledge and mobilize political engagement, depending on media content and characteristics of the users. Thereby this dissertation contributes to the field of media effects research, as well as ongoing political socialization research in the social sciences.

In this final I chapter I will first give a brief overview of the findings. In the second part of this final chapter I focus on a number of overarching key conclusions and their implications for future research as well as media policy.

Summary of findings

The first empirical study of this dissertation served the purpose to place the subsequent studies into context by comparing the demographic group investigated in this dissertation – Dutch adolescents – to European adolescents and older media users using multi-level regression modeling based on European Social Survey data. From a system level perspective I find that media effects do not vary greatly across Europe. I did find, however, that countries characterized by a consolidated and mature democracy, like the Netherlands, are more likely

to bring about engaged young citizens than countries in which democracy less developed. With regard to the second comparative perspective I find that media effects on political attitudes, in particular attachment to a political party and political trust, and political participation become stronger with age. For adolescents these effects were statistically insignificant or just about significant. So why should we study media effects among a group which is hardly developed? The answer is already hidden in the question itself: Because it allows us to study the dynamics of the development of media influence on political socialization. As media effects are best conceptualized as mutually self-reinforcing spirals (Slater, 2007), it is particularly interesting to analyze the stage at which this spiraling process begins, to understand the mechanism and opportunities to stimulate the process.

In the second empirical study (Chapter 3) I set out to do so by undertaking an in-depth analysis of such a self-reinforcing spiral using Structural Equation Modeling on three wave panel data. Focusing on growth in political knowledge and news use I provide evidence that the starting point of the spiral is rather located on the side of political knowledge than news use. News use, on the other hand, does contribute to political learning over time, independent of the background characteristics of the user.

In Chapter 4 this argument is taken one step further: from political knowledge to the effect of being informed, or rather the perception that one is knowledgeable about politics. Here I present the results of a study that investigates causes and effects of internal efficacy or the perception that one is informed enough about what is going on in politics and capable to participate in the political process. Using data from all four panel waves I analyze news media influence on the development of internal efficacy not as one bulk of information, but differentiate between different types of media sources and level of involvement of the users. I find that whereas TV news use has no effect on growth in internal political efficacy, reading newspapers and using classic (non-interactive) online news sources has a positive impact on

political efficacy. The strongest effect, however, is found for interactive online media that require users to participate in message creation.

In the final study, presented in Chapter 5, I am interested in finding out if targeted media content can be strategically used to stimulate political participation among the young in a real-world scenario. I do this by studying the effects of exposure to a specific political information program, that fulfilled a number of criteria that have been theorized to be effective, on a young audience. The findings imply that a program specifically designed to be relevant for a young audience in style and content can in fact mobilize the young, independent and additional to effects of classic news use. A second noteworthy finding is that despite its somewhat 'silly' presentation of politics, watching the program did not affect the level of cynicism. Finally, the effects on mobilization were strongest among those viewers that had the lowest level of political interest, implying that such formats can be a first step to bridge the gap between those who are knowledgeable, interested and likely to participate and those adolescents who are disengaged from politics.

Key conclusions and discussion

In this dissertation I posed the question whether media play a very prominent role in the process of political socialization, given that the influence of other agents of political socialization, most notably parents, has changed or even diminished over the past decades. According to the findings of my studies, the answer to this question has to be "no" at first sight. The size of the effects of media use, be it entertainment media, news media or even interactive online news sources, on political knowledge, trust, or engagement, are arguably small. In the case of political attitudes, like political cynicism and trust, I even find in two studies that it is unrelated to media use at this age, whereas there is a traceable relationship at later stages in life. Moreover, once I take an in depth look at the causal relationship between news use and a variable of political socialization, namely political knowledge, it becomes

apparent that the causality goes both ways, with pre-existing political knowledge being the stronger source of influence (see Chapter 3).

So, does that mean that media are irrelevant to the process of political socialization? Again, the answer has to be no. The effects I present in this dissertation might be small, but their statistical significance can also not be denied. In fact, small effect sizes are common in studies on media effects among children and adolescents, including non-political outcome variables (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013; Ekström & Östman, 2013). What is even more important is that they mark the starting point of a life-long process of mutual influence between media use and political attitudes, political knowledge and political engagement (see Chapter 2). The role of media use in political socialization becomes particularly visible if we do not look at the influence of 'the media' as one cohesive institution on the full process of political socialization, and instead focus on specific aspects of the process as well as specific media content. In the following section I will discuss specific media effects on each of the political outcome variables I introduced in the first chapter thereby combining the results of the studies presented in this dissertation.

Political knowledge and internal efficacy

Media are first and foremost a source of information. Therefore it is theoretically sensible to begin by investigating media effects on political socialization by analyzing political learning. Do adolescents learn about politics from the media? What seems to be a trivial question is in fact a very complex process. In order to learn it is not enough to simply be exposed to political information – the information also needs to be processed and remembered. Whether or not this happens and leads to the perception that one is in fact knowledgeable about politics depends on three factors a) how much a young person already knows about politics; b) the type of medium they are using; and, c) whether or not they have an active role in the message creation process.

These findings have a number of implications for political socialization and political communication research. Starting with the first result that growth in political knowledge and news use are interdependent, yet political knowledge is the more powerful factor of the two, especially at a younger age. This finding contributes to research on the widening knowledge gap between the information rich and the information poor (Eveland & Scheufele, 2000). This dissertation adds to the existing literature by providing evidence that the separation of those who benefit to a great extent from news media and those who do not, starts earlier than the age of fifteen. This implies that the foundation of the knowledge gap is laid out during childhood. This also means that childhood is the period in life during which we would have to start intervening in order to bridge the knowledge gap.

Turning to the second major conclusion, differential media effects on political knowledge, the findings of my dissertation are very much in line with previous research on the matter (Frank & Kanihan, 1997), but also show that the differences in the degree to which TV, newspapers and online news media affect political learning have become stronger over the past decades. Whereas Chaffee and others found that newspaper reading had *stronger* effects on political learning than TV news, I find that adolescents do not feel that they are learning anything from watching TV news at all that helps them to understand politics. As TV news is still the most popular news source among the young, this finding means that it crucial to incorporate features into the general news that facilitate picking up information for adolescents. Such features should increase the relevance of the news presented to young audience: for example by reporting on topics that have a large impact on the lives of the young (Graber, 2001).

Political attitudes

Contrary to the results on political learning, I do not find any significant effects of media use on political attitudes among adolescents: Neither on political trust, nor the

proximity to a political party, nor political cynicism. Likewise, the type of media content did not matter: neither news use, nor entertainment media use, nor a mix between the two investigated in chapter 5 proved to affect political attitudes. Interestingly, I did find evidence of a relationship between political trust and proximity to a political party and media exposure for older media users in chapter 2. Similarly, Elenbaas and de Vreese (2008) find that news media use and political cynicism are related among a sample of young Dutch voters age 18-24. To be specific, they find that exposure to strategic news leads to higher levels of political cynicism, and ultimately to a specific voting behavior.

This finding is an addition to the research on the relationship between political cynicism and media use. Much like in the case of political learning the relationship between the two is conceptualized as a mutually self-reinforcing spiral (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Those who are already cynical about politics select media content that reinforces their views on politics leading to increasing levels of cynicism (selective exposure). As I did not find any empirical traces of this spiral among adolescents, I speculate that the spiral of cynicism starts during late adolescence, probably in relation to participation in the first elections. However, as I could not match content analysis data with survey data to investigate the causal mechanism in detail, this conclusion should be interpreted with caution. More research is certainly needed to unveil the specifics of the antecedents of the spiral of cynicism.

Political engagement and participation

The final aspect of political socialization I analyzed in this dissertation is the development of political engagement. As it the key aspect of this dissertation, I investigated the phenomenon from a few different angles in three empirical studies. A common theme in the findings of these studies is that they provide evidence that media use can in fact mobilize the young to participate in the political process even long before they are eligible to vote.

A responsive well-functioning democracy is characterized by ample opportunities for all citizens – young and old – to play an active role during the elective cycle by making their voices heard, using their power as consumers, or directly getting in contact with members of the legislative system. These types of unconventional political participation are not exactly widespread among the young: yet, 72% of the respondents of the panel indicated to have participated in one way or another during the field period. Even if it was just by posting a short political message on a social network site. According to my analyses, media use, in particular political information media use, did contribute to an increase in these activities over time. The causal relationship between both factors runs partially through the development of internal efficacy (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007), as pointed out earlier. This mechanism is also relevant when it comes to political participation in the classic sense: participation in the first general elections, which is a very important event in the process of political socialization (Sears & Valentino, 1997).

Weighing the different forms of participation against each other, I find that media use is especially effective when it comes to a positive influence on online participation, like signing petitions or participating in online discussions about politics. Both findings are in line with and add to the body of literature with regard to political socialization of the young (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011; Lee, Shah, & McLeod, 2012; Quintelier & Vissers, 2008). According to the communication mediation model developed by McLeod, Shah and colleagues (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2010) the causal relationship between news media use and political participation is best understood as a mediated process in which *talking* about politics serves as a mediator between both. I suggest extending this notion and use the argument in broader perspective. In order to mobilize the young to develop political engagement, political information needs to be reflected upon, be it through political talk online or offline, or deliberation during attentive news use. It is important to note that this

process can be facilitated by adjusting political information content to be more relevant to a young audience.

Reaching the tuned out generation

So far I have argued that there are several ways in which media affect political socialization. In this dissertation I have demonstrated that particularly political information, provided it is relevant enough, can even mobilize those who generally have little interest in politics. However, there is one important condition for this process to work: young people need to be encouraged and need to decide to *use* political information; otherwise there will not be an effect. This is a point that has raised concerns among many. David Mindich's (2005) book about the tuned out generation is probably the most prominent publication dealing with the subject: young people do not follow the news anymore; they do not read newspapers and generally do not care about the political world. Although Mindich's bleak description of the young generation in America does not fit the Dutch case equally well – 4 out of 5 of the respondents in the panel report to watch the evening news at least once a week – there is also an undeniable lack of interest in politics in the Netherlands. Almost half of the participants in the panel report to have low interest in national politics, for international politics this number even increases to 62%. Yet, as I have pointed out earlier, involvement and attention are an important precondition for political information to have an effect on political engagement. This leads to an important puzzle that goes beyond this dissertation. How do we get the young to tune in the political debate in the first place? How can we get young people to care about politics just enough to start following the news? Arguably an important part of the solution to this puzzle has to be located outside the media.

Political education in schools seems to be an obvious answer. Here programs that require active participation of students like debates or mock elections seem to be especially effective (McLeod et al., 2010). I would like to point to another possible strategy to solve this

problem. Given the positive effects of news use in the long run, stimulating media socialization to include more political information is likely to influence the process of political socialization in a positive way. This means political information would have to become an integral part of children's experience with media, even before they reach adolescence.

Political engagement in the new millennium

In the introduction of this dissertation I argued that our knowledge of political socialization needs to be updated as the advent of the Internet has changed the media as well as the political landscape profoundly. In the empirical studies presented in this dissertation it has become apparent that the Internet has indeed become an integral part of political socialization in the past years. Moreover, the Internet has not merely opened up new places to engage in politics; it has also had an impact on the causal mechanisms of political socialization itself.

The reason is that engaging in politics and talking about politics online is often fundamentally different from talking about politics offline (Oser, Hooghe, & Marien, 2013). First, because communication itself is inherently different online and offline: online communication can by asynchronous in time, messages can potentially be stored forever, which means they can be read and re-read at a later point in time, and participants of online conversations have more time to create their messages, implying that they have more room to deliberate. Second, online platforms provide the opportunity to extend their social networks and talk to peers and adults one would not normally encounter in everyday life – including representatives of the political class. Finally, talking about politics online is blurring the border between communication and participation. Adolescents can, for example, post a link to an online petition and motivate others to sign on a social networking site.

All of these factors hold the potential to have a positive impact on political socialization (Coleman, 2008). As I have argued earlier, political information is much more likely to lead to a growth in political knowledge or engagement if it is reflected upon. The affordances of online communication naturally lead to deliberation about politics, provided the communication is about politics.

Yet, there also is a downside. When the academic debate about online influence on political participation first started, the main concern of scholars was that using the Internet might take up a lot of time that would otherwise be spent on community activities (Kraut et al., 1998). Moreover, time spent online was seen to be time spent in social isolation and anonymity, which further decreases the feeling of belonging to a society in which one has an active role. Whereas the latter point is no longer in the focus of the academic debate, as social networking sites and other online services have changed the premises of the online experience, the time budget argument is still valid. The Internet is indeed a place offering an abundance of opportunities to engage in politics, but it also offers limitless opportunities to avoid politics altogether. So, in order to have a positive impact on the development of active citizenship the key problem is to get the conversation about politics started. Once young people become active online, there is a good chance they will develop an active attitude towards their citizenship.

Limitations and implications for future research

The process of political socialization is a complicated process starting at birth and continuing throughout our lives. Naturally, this dissertation cannot explain the role of the media throughout this entire process. This implies that many questions remain unanswered. Moreover, this dissertation is mainly based on one data source, namely a panel survey of four measurements over the course of two and a half years. While this is a rich data set allowing for elaborate testing of hypotheses, it is also constrained in several ways: it is limited to one

country at a specific period in time, there is a limited amount of concepts that could be measured, and the time span in between the measurements is relatively long. All of these constraints have implications on the generalizability of my results.

The Netherlands is a mature democracy, also characterized by a relative high level of wealth and a well-functioning social system. All in all, it is an environment that provides plentiful opportunities to adolescents to learn, to join the workforce, and to engage in their private lives. All of these activities are also important steps adolescents need to take at this age that take up time and effort (Sigel & Hoskin, 1981). In other words, there is arguably less reason to go on the streets and call for a better future for themselves. This is just one of the possible system level variables that could affect the media's influence on political socialization. Others are the media system and the availability of (relevant to the young) political information in the media, the political system and to what it allows citizens to become involved during the electoral cycle, and the educational system (for example Quintelier & Hooghe, 2013). Therefore, in order to be confident that the findings in these studies also apply to other contexts future studies need to expand the geographical scope. It would be especially interesting to investigate difference between democratic and non-democratic countries to find out to what degree the role of the media in political socialization depends upon the political context.

Second, the length of the questionnaire used in the panel survey had to be limited to ensure that respondents would participate in the subsequent waves of the panel survey. That means that a number of key concepts could only be measured in a rather crude way. Parental influence, for example, is reduced to questions regarding the SES, educational and occupational background of the parents, their party preference, and whether or not they are subscribed to a newspaper. Variables that have proven to be of influence in the past, like the discussion culture at home (Chaffee, McLeod, & Atkin, 1971) could not be taken into

account. However, these variables are found to be of less relevance in recent studies in the field (Lee, Shah, McLeod, 2012). Moreover, although the questionnaire covered a considerable amount of questions regarding media use, our measures of exposure to media cannot fully do justice to the phenomenon. In the ever changing world of online news media (Trilling, 2013), we could only select a limited amount of news sources in the questionnaire, implying that the use of many blogs or websites relevant to the subject are not tapped. Additionally, as it becomes apparent from our data, Social Networking Sites are likely to cover political information from time to time which could also influence the process of political socialization through messages of peers. This is an especially interesting phenomenon, which certainly should be studied in depth in future research.

The third constraint of my data is that it is limited in time and the number of measurements. As it became quite clear from the second empirical study presented in Chapters 2 and 3, media use already plays a role in the process of political socialization before the age of 15, and socialization does not stop once we turn out to vote for the first time. In this dissertation I could therefore only analyze a short, yet important, period of a continuous process. Developments I find might become stronger or weaker over time. The first empirical study of this dissertation certainly points in the direction that the media become even more important agent of socialization during young adulthood. More research is needed to unravel the effect of age on the process. For example, we do relatively little about the effect of seniority on media effects on political attitudes or participation.

Collecting panel data among adolescents is challenging. On the one hand, developments take place really quickly and in order to get a good grasp of causal relationships it would be useful to have weekly data on the other hand, young respondents are easily bored and sensitized by questions in panel surveys. Having four measurements in two and a half years was a compromise between aiming to have a large enough sample at the end of the

survey and enough information about them in the meantime, but obviously it is not optimal. Therefore future research should do both, focus on short-term effects of causal mechanisms, preferably in the form of experiments and also expand the longitudinal scope of two years.

Finally, my data is constrained by being *quantitative survey data,* which means there are questions I could answer and research questions that have to be left for other types of research. Qualitative interviews, for example, could provide insight in what motivates adolescents to participate or alienates them from politics. Observation of media use, especially in participatory online media, would help us to get a better picture of how adolescents use political information media today without having to rely on self-reports. Finally, this study on media effects relies solely on survey data thereby more or less neglecting the specifics of the content that is supposed to have an impact on political socialization. That means that I could ultimately only investigate half the picture. Adding *content analysis* data that describes in detail the characteristics of content adolescents have used, would allow matching cause and effect in a far more precise way, improve the modeling, and understand what drives the effects. This type of combined analysis of content and effects would allow us to address relevant questions like: Are specific subjects more likely to raise adolescent's knowledge about politics than others? Do certain frames mobilize or demobilize participation among the young? What is the effect of infotainment on the development of political knowledge and internal efficacy? Therefore, future research should combine content analysis, media use, and variables of political socialization to arrive at integrated models of political socialization.

Concluding remarks

If there is one thing to be learned from this dissertation, it is that media cannot do wonders to turn a disengaged youth around and to create a young citizenry that participates in democracy. Neither should the media be blamed for adolescent's apparent alienation from

politics. It's not the media's fault that young people feel disconnected or simply do not care about politics. If anything, the influence of media on political mobilization tends to be positive. The role of the media in the process of political socialization is to strengthen the foundation laid by parents and teachers and build forth on the attitudes and norms young people are picking up around them, ultimately taking adolescents into an upward spiral of political learning and engagement.

The conclusion of a dissertation is meant to highlight the essence of the research presented, boiling it all down to a grand take home message. In this chapter I identified the key findings, discussed my results in the light of the societal and academic debate and suggested implications for policy, education and future research. Yet, to be honest, I actually do not know the essence of everything, because my research on these matters has only just started. Moreover, any essence or final conclusion could only be a snap shot as the next generation of adolescents is already growing up. Younger children today have never known a world without *Twitter* or *Facebook* and will use it even more naturally than the adolescents in the sample I analyzed for this dissertation. As they learn, buy, communicate, even live online, these children will engage in politics online as well – which will lead to a paradigm change in political socialization research. And I am curious to follow this development as a scientist and a citizen.

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Appendix

Table 3: Descriptives of the dependent and independent variables used in Chapter 2

	14-20		34-40	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Political trust	4.95	.02	4.66	.007
Party affiliation	.34	.005	.55	.001
Signed petition	.22	.005	.25	.001
Boycotted product	.11	.003	.17	.001
Age	17.83	.01	49, 90	.050
Gender (1=female)	.51	.006	0.50	.001
Political interest	2.15	.009	2.56	.002
Education	11.02	.024	12.72	.011
Ideology	5.05	.02	5.144	.006
News exposure	3.12	.022	5.03	.008
Entertainment exp	5.76	.038	5.14	.009